

OLIVER NORTH'S OTHER WAR



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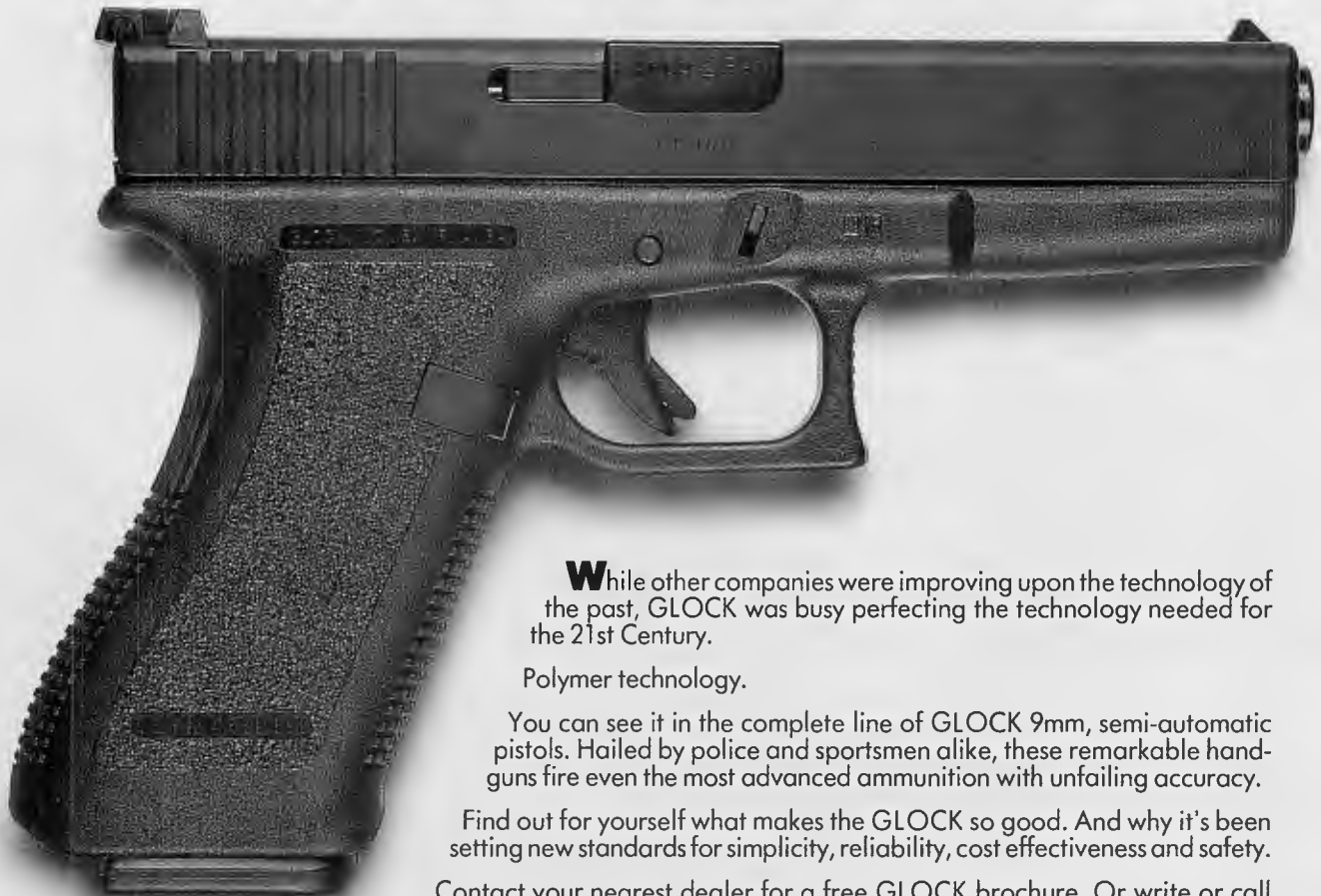
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CASULL'S CANNON

Peter G. Kokalis

Freedom Arms is producing a limited number of Dick Casull's .454 Magnums. If you're ready for the big time, these big-bore boomers pack a handgun punch second to none **26**

BAGH-I-ZAQIRA GARDEN PARTY

Jake Border

We trekked up to Afghanistan's front lines to observe a coordinated, multi-party, mujahideen assault on government-held Taloqan. What we got was the battle that almost wasn't, due to internecine struggles within the muj camp. With the Soviets gone, muj factions are turning their wrath upon each other — historically precedent and mutually destructive **30**



Muj vs Muj — page 30



SOF

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Modern Mountain Men — page 40

BUCKSKINS AND LEAD BALLS

Morgan Tanner

To their way of thinking, these 20th century mountain men were born 150 years too late. Though they're stuck in our technology-dominated world, these rugged individualists are more at home with 1830's-era buckskins, tepees, trade beads and muzzleloaders—with no "civilization" allowed **40**

ECHOES OF HONOR WHISPER OF REEDS

Kregg Jorgenson

While serving with Echo Company Rangers in the Delta, a South Vietnamese pointman was awarded an NVA general's pistol for his devotion and bravery above and beyond the call of duty. No one knew then that the trophy would soon rob him of his honor and his life **48**

EMBERS OF A BRUSH FIRE WAR

David Nott

El Salvador's communist insurgents are losing ground on both the political and military battlefields. Why? A combination of better trained and motivated Salvo soldiers and an overhauled democratic political process is putting the FMLN on the run **52**

STRIKING BACK

Neil C. Livingstone & David Halevy

Marine Lieutenant Colonel Oliver North was behind



El Salvador — page 52

the scenes fighting — and beating — Middle East terrorism long before Iran/contra became a media circus. North's been glorified and vilified, but there's no doubt about one thing: he got the job done **58**

BLACKJACK'S WAR

Isaac Staats

MACV/SOG spike team walks into a large-scale NVA ambush—and is damned lucky to walk out again. It's Force 10 pucker-factor time when you have to use bodies—friend and foe alike—for cover **64**



Oliver North vs Terrorism — page 58

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Time to choose sides

COVER

COVER: Salvadoran Parachute Battalion troops have become highly proficient in the art of counter guerrilla operations during the past few years. These *paracaidistas* are among the elite units that have ebbed the tide of the FMLN insurgency in El Salvador. Complete SitRep on page 52, "Embers of a Brush Fire War." Photo: Steve Salisbury

INSET: Marine Lieutenant Colonel Oliver North's involvement in combatting Middle East terrorism is the focus of a chapter in frequent SOF contributor Neil C. Livingstone's upcoming book, *The Cult of Counterterrorism*. Here Livingstone teams up with David Halevy to give SOF readers an insider's look at how North fought—and often won—the war in the shadows. See "Striking Back" on page 58. Photo: AP/Wide World



COMMAND GUIDANCE

by Robert K. Brown

No-Win War

BEFORE the Bush administration presses on with its so-called "war" on drugs, it ought to spend some time reviewing the history of the war in Vietnam.

In waging the drug war, Bush seems intent on repeating the mistakes of Lyndon Johnson in Vietnam. The list so far includes:

1) He has committed American military personnel without first obtaining explicit permission of Congress. The failure to bring Congress formally into the decision-making loop guarantees a lacerating, self-destructive debate over the drug war—beginning about the time the first American casualties start coming in. It also all but guarantees that, like Vietnam, resources will have to be dribbled into the fight rather than committed in mass without reservation.

2) He is providing inappropriate military aid to our allies. Instead of asking the Colombian government what it needs to fight the traffickers, Bush rushed \$65 million worth of hardware to Colombia—85 percent of which that country says is inappropriate and useless. This suggests Bush, like Johnson, has a condescending view of the friendlies, and that all but guarantees Colombia's relationship with the U.S. will evolve from ally to dependent—a sure prescription for defeat.

3) He is asking our armed forces to perform a mission impossible in assuming a greater role in border interdiction. A half-million U.S. troops and more than one million ARVN never succeeded in stopping the penetration of the 700-mile-long South Vietnamese border. Expecting the military to seal the 5,000-mile-long U.S. border and 5,000 miles of coast is not realistic.

4) He is picking allies without first determining their reliability. The \$65 million in aid went to the Colombian army—many of whose officers are reported to be in bed with the traffickers. It is hard to think of a more certain way to court disaster.

5) Bush wants to fight his war without having to raise taxes to pay for it. Like Johnson, he is telling the American people they can have both guns and butter. We can't.

6) Like Johnson, Bush is manufacturing a problem with the uncounted enemy. In order to show that the war on drugs is winnable, the Bush administration has given wide currency to a survey purporting the drug use among Americans declined 37 percent since 1985. Yet during that period the amount of money Americans spent on drugs is reported to have nearly doubled. What this means is that it isn't the number of Americans using drugs that's declined, but rather the number of Americans willing to admit using drugs. Eventually the true numbers will emerge, and when they do the psychological impact could be as shattering as the Tet offensive.

The war in Vietnam was a no-win war because American forces were not allowed to win, even though a strong case can be made for the proposition that the war was in fact winnable. Waging war on drugs in South America and at home poses an infinitely more difficult problem. If there is one certainty in an uncertain world, it is that it will not be won by refusing to learn from the past and repeating its mistakes.

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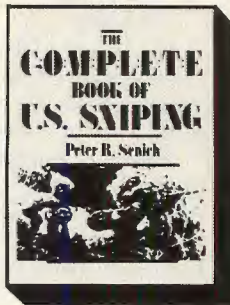
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by Peter R. Senich

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PLEASE DON'T EAT THE TULIPS...

The Defence Ministry of Holland is issuing vegetarian rations, for those who for reasons of religion or philosophy do not eat meat. All-veggie rations are not really new, however; Charlie called them "rice balls" and the old horse soldiers called them "beans."

SATURDAY NIGHT JIVE...

The panel set up in Maryland to ponder which handguns are acceptable to the tastes of that august commonwealth have thus far examined some 453, none of which have been rejected. They say they have another 351 to go, and these will be tougher to judge. We wonder if they are the Special ones, or the Saturday Night ones. Or maybe they're the Assault ones. Pity High-Standard stopped making their pretty pink-and-blue-anodized small frame revolvers—these political aunts in Maryland probably would have liked them.

INDIANA SALISBURY...

One of SOF's favorite correspondents from the war zones in Central America, Steve Salisbury, sends greetings. He's doing well in Guatemala and has started an export business for sharkskin belts. Steve also recently starred in a series of commercials for Pepsi, shot in Guatemala for viewing in El Salvador. His part? Indiana Jones, of course, complete with fedora, bullwhip and beautiful blonde.

BULLETIN BOARD



Sergeant Dawkins is a gang specialist featured in the SOF story on gangs and crack (see "Crack in the Heartland," SOF, July '89). If you doubt that dedicated men like Dawkins lay their life on the line every day to protect our neighborhoods from the menace of drugs and gangs, read the above graffiti that was recently spotted in "Bloods Territory" in Denver. "187" is California Penal Code for Murder. Any questions? Photo: David Bjorkman, National News Service



The SOF ski team is planning one or more bachelor ski trips to coincide with the Mahre Ski School this season. Here SOF's R.K. Brown starts down slalom after collision with lost Spetsnaz trooper. Inset, standing left to right are Phil Mahre, Paul Fanshaw, R.K. Brown and Mahre instructor; Mike Williams and Mike McPike kneeling. Last spring in NASTAR competitions Brown and Williams won two bronze medals, and Fanshaw two silver. For info write SKI SOF, Box 693, Boulder, CO 80306. Photo: Summit Photography

NEW FACES OF 1989...

From correspondent Marty Casey comes word that in a frantic, last-minute bid to show new faces to the Central American presidents who met in Tela, Honduras, in early August, State Department officials were successful only in denigrating the contra political leadership and exacerbating problems between the Northern Front and their allies from the Atlantic Coast and the South.

The foggy minds from foggy bottom made the decision to place what they called "brilliant and experienced" advisers with each of the different military leaders. The following biography is taken from the State Department publication *Nicaraguan Biographies: a Resource Book*. (Jan. '88, U.S. State Department, Bureau of Public Affairs), and it describes the "brilliant and experienced" adviser State assigned to guide the Southern Front commander, "Ganso."

CASTILLO Rivas, Donald, *Economist. Coordinator of the RN's international relations commission. Born on October 21, 1943, in Managua. Left Nicaragua in the aftermath of the Conservative Party's 1958 Olama y Mollejones invasion attempt, joining Indalecio Pastora's [uncle of Eden Pastora] anti-Somoza guerrilla group. Captured in Costa Rica and sent to the Cuban embassy for asylum. Flew to Cuba where he became involved in the Nicaraguan exile community, including future FSLN leaders such as Carlos Fonseca. Spent the next 10 years in Cuba, studying and then teaching at the University of Havana and its regional branches. Traveled to Chile after the 1970 election of Allende. Served as a university professor there, 1970-73. Active in organizing Nicaraguan exiles in Chile, especially after the 1972 earthquake in Managua. At the time of the military coup against Allende, Castillo was outside Chile; denied re-entry, he lost everything he owned. Denied re-entry into Nicaragua as well, he found asylum in Mexico. Once established there, he became a member of Pedro Joaquin Chamorro's Democratic Liberation Union and worked with the social democratic Socialist International. After Chamorro's assassination, he worked with the FAO and with the FSLN, cooperating with Ernesto Cardenal and the Group of 12. One of the seven advisers to the Nicaraguan junta formed in Costa Rica shortly before Somoza's fall;*

co-author of its original program of government. Returned to Managua in mid-1979 expecting to work for the new government; however, was questioned by Cuban intelligence officials on his loyalty to the FSLN. Left Nicaragua again, joining first ARDE (1982), then BOS (1985). Editor of the book *Centroamerica: Mas Alla de la Crisis* (1982) and of *Foro Centroamericano*, a Nicaraguan opposition journal published in Costa Rica, 1985-86.

If the pinstripes can't find a better grade of "brilliant and experienced" adviser to the contra commanders than this, it's no wonder we can't win.

NORIEGA & 'NAZIS' OUT IN NO TIME...

Brigadier General Marc Cisneros, commander of the U.S. Army South, the main component of the multi-service Southern Command based at the U.S. military facilities around the Panama Canal, told Madrid news agency *Efe* he would need only 30 minutes to get rid of Panamanian strongman Gen. Manuel Antonio Noriega and the "Nazis" around him. General Cisneros, you have our permission. Take an hour and really clean house, if you'd care to.

HELP SGT. McDENG TAKE A BITE OUT OF DEMOCRACY...

From Reuters came a list of 11 dial-a-snitch hotlines set up in mainland China for the folks to report anyone they suspect of being a counter-revolutionary. We tried several of these numbers—wanted to snitch off Bob Brown y'understand—but have to report they were all busy. We hear the drill is: dial the number, then blow the whistle—very close to the receiver. An athletic whistle seems to work best.

GENERAL MINORU GENDA...

Japanese General Minoru Genda, planner of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and post-war chief of staff of the Japanese air force, died in August shortly before his 85th birthday. A highly regarded military professional, Genda was awarded the U.S. Legion of Merit for his role in rebuilding the Japanese Self-Defense Forces and cooperating closely with

the United States. He once observed, "Wars are fought and then they end, and when they end we don't look back—only forward." Genda was a top fighter pilot with over 5,000 hours of flight time, and was instrumental in arming post-war Japan with the F-104 Starfighter.

MARINES LOOKING FOR A FEW GOOD READS...

Word is out from Marine Corps Commandant A.M. Gray: "Marines fight better when they fight smarter...read more books." Sergeants should read a minimum of two (ideally four) a year, colonels three to start, with six ideally. Good idea. After you've polished off *Guidebook for Marines*, may we recommend some from SOF's action adventure series?

OH NO, NOT G.I. JOE!...

The U.S. Court of Appeals has judged G.I. Joe, as imported by Hasbro, to be a "representation of a human being used as a child's plaything." In other words, a *doll*, like Barbie and the Cabbage Patch Kids — and *not a toy soldier*. A toy soldier, for arcane reasons since lost to history, is not subject to import tax. A doll, however, is subject to 12 percent tariff. OK, OK, give 'em their 12 percent, but don't call G.I. Joe a *doll*. If we let 'em get away with that, next they'll try and say Rambo is an *actor*.

BALLOON BOMBS 1945 — OUCHI DOLLS 1989...

Women in Yamaguchi, Japan who worked on the 9,000 balloon bombs sent via the jet stream toward the West Coast during World War II, have sent a gift of two lacquered dolls to Dottie McGinnis of Klamath Falls, Oregon. Mrs. McGinnis lost two sisters to one of the balloon bombs in May 1945. Oregon was the only state where a military base was shelled, the only state to be bombed by enemy aircraft, and the only state where there were deaths resulting from direct enemy action in World War II.

CHINA WATCHING...

Exiled Chinese patriots in France have made public a smuggled

document they say is the manifesto of an organization called "The Chinese League for Justice and Democracy," a non-violent group committed to the pro-democracy ideals which were crushed by the 4 June military crackdown. An umbrella organization calling itself the "Federation for Democracy in China" has also been formed.

Perhaps less non-violent are those who are firing shots in Beijing at night after the cobblestone is rolled up and the only ones out are the PLA manning roadblocks. It is assumed the snipers are armed with some of the more than 1,000 weapons taken from the army by students last June. It is not known if this is armed resistance per se, or merely the relatives of those crushed under communist tanks giving tit-for-tat.

Lastly, a trust is being established to build a "Goddess of Democracy," a la Statue of Liberty, for eventual placement in Tiananmen Square "upon the installation of a democratic form of government in their country." Since that may be some time, it is planned to build it in Lake Havasu City, Arizona, in the interim. Private donations are sought. Think they can pull it off? They moved the London Bridge over, didn't they? Call (602) 855-8095 for details.

XENOPHOBIA HAZARDOUS TO HEALTH...

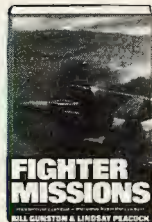
The *Australian* newspaper reports that the North Korean communist regime has executed two women in public for requesting permission to marry foreigners. So what do they do to those who *do not* ask permission? Assign a fate worse than death and make them marry a North Korean regime communist?

STEALTH A STEAL?...

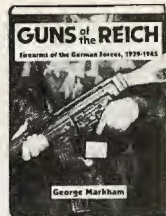
With a \$274 million a copy "fly-away" price the B-2 Stealth bomber has created some sticker shock on Capitol Hill. Translated, this means we can afford it but the lawmakers don't want to cut any lower priority projects to fund it. By the time tankers would be added to the fleet to give the B-1 the range of the B-2, the unit cost is pretty close. Having this phantom bomber in the arsenal is an integral part of the triad concept and the basis for our current negotiations on arms control. The tortoise or the hare? If Ivan can't see it, we'll opt for the flying tortoise. ☘



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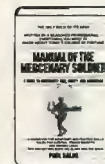
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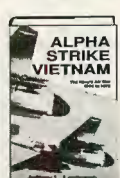
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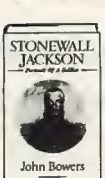
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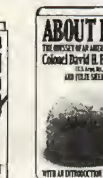
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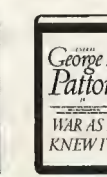
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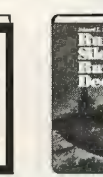
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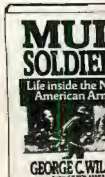
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SOF 12/89

RAPE FOLLOWED GUN CONFISCATION...

Sirs:

I imagine it's not often that you receive letters from female readers, but I recently went through such an ordeal that I felt compelled to voice my opinion regarding our rights, as American citizens, to bear arms.

Three months ago, while my husband was "at sea" (he's a member of the military), I was the target of what our local Sheriff's Department called "adolescent pranks."

These "pranks" included abusing and poisoning our family dog, a total of nine break-ins, animal mutilations, and life-threatening phone calls. This activity persisted for three weeks when the law enforcement agency decided I shouldn't have firearms in my house. The entire experience culminated the night the Sheriff's Department informed me that my two children would be placed in a foster home unless I "surrendered" all weapons.

I gave in to them: and that same night I was raped and beaten by two young men in my own home. My point is: When will the rights of honest citizens be placed before the rights of obnoxious punks?

Name withheld by SOF
Oak Harbor, Washington

SOF called the Island County Sheriff's Department and the doctors and lawyer the writer dealt with following her ordeal and confirmed her story. We hope Howard Metzbaum and the vermin at Handgun Control, Inc. are satisfied.

CONSULAR ADVICE...

Sirs:

Great articles on crack and also on the guys who go in and bring the kidnapped children out of Jordan, etc.

On that subject, I am very ashamed of the behavior of my own organization, the State Department, as I seem to be all too often these days. Let me say, however, that as a U.S. Consul I have regularly issued replacement passports to U.S. citizens and their children who needed to leave an area in a hurry. I continue to do so, and in fact just last week an American woman came in with her child trying to get away from her husband, who was mistreating them. The locals can often be very Middle Eastern in their domestic relations and U.S. gals find



FLAK



this hard to accept. I've probably helped seven or eight women in this way since I've been at my present post.

Let me give some "consular advice."

Always make a copy of your passport and those of all of your U.S.-born children, including the cover, first and second pages, and the page with the visa for the country you're currently visiting, and keep these in a separate place from your actual passport. Foreign husbands always grab the passports of their wives and children thinking that thus they cannot leave the country. They're wrong. Any U.S. Consulate will, must, issue a replacement passport to any American citizen who states that he or she has lost or had stolen his/her passport. Same for children. The trick is to be able to prove that you're an American citizen, as often the foreign husband will also take all the documents from his U.S. wife, as well as her passport. The citizenship matter is instantly resolved by presenting to the Consul the copy of your passport. With that, the issuance of a replacement should be a matter of less than an hour. Of course, all vital documents should be copied and the copies kept separate from the originals.

Do not indicate to the Consul that there may be some sort of custody

dispute or that there is an escape plan!!! If I'm the Consul, it'll be OK, but if it's a normal State Department weenie you may be opening a can of worms that'll turn into a nest of Mr. No-Shoulders in no time. Best to say that the docs were lost in a boating accident and that your mother in the U.S. is sick and wants badly to see her daughter and grandchild... or some other tear-jerk sob story. Don't imply that there is anything that the host country could object to. *Ever!!*

Now, if hubby has taken all the money too there is a further problem. U.S. Consulates will provide emergency funds for travel back to the U.S., provided all other sources are exhausted. This means that the normal travel cover will not work. Best then to contact someone in the States and have funds wired either to a bank or to the Consulate and then show up and ask for a new passport. Anyhow, it can be done, and I hope this helps a little. You can put this out if you want, but do not use my name, for obvious reasons.

Name and address
withheld

The writer has served as U.S. Consul at a number of postings. SOF respects his desire to remain anonymous. SOF thinks it is a national tragedy and disgrace that

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the climate within the U.S. Department of State is such that he feels it necessary to remain so.

AFGHANS' SIDE OF DEATH MARCH...

Sirs:

The "Afghan Death March" by Bill Northacker in the Feb. '89 issue was a very interesting article, but I feel I should make a few comments to set the record straight.

1. "Ghilzee" referred to in the article is actually Ghilzai.

2. The account of the last meeting between Wazir Akbar Khan and Sir William MacNaughton was incomplete and not at all clear. The story goes like this: MacNaughton met with Akbar Khan outside the fort where the British were stationed, to talk about the fate of the British Army and other subjects in Kabul. In the course of the meeting MacNaughton made many demands with usual British arrogance. Akbar Khan got furious and told MacNaughton that to assure the survival of the Britons and the rest, the British should surrender. Then only Akbar Khan would guarantee safe passage for them to India. MacNaughton was outraged at the suggestion and went for his dagger. Akbar Khan drew his pistol, ironically a gift from MacNaughton, and shot him on the spot. The remaining members of the delegation were sent back to the fort to inform General Elphinstone of the Afghan position.

3. After negotiation between Wazir Akbar Khan and General

Elphinstone's men the British did not agree on surrendering but they did agree on the terms of a "guaranteed safe passage" offered by the Afghans as an alternative to surrender. They agreed to leave the fort in Kabul and head straight to Jalalabad with the condition that they leave behind all their artillery and the bulk of their guns, ammunition and other military supplies. They were to carry only food and a handful of guns and limited ammunition and in turn the Afghans would assure their safety. The British agreed and the journey started as indicated in the article. After a day's journey, as the procession reached Bothkhak, the Afghan scouts discovered that the British had violated the terms of the agreement and were carrying a large number of artillery pieces and guns. When word got to the tribal chiefs, they all ganged up on Akbar Khan, accusing him of selling out and trusting the British. Wazir Akbar Khan had kept the tribal chiefs at bay by convincing them that the British had agreed to leave Kabul under an agreement that was mutually beneficial. Such an agreement was very important to Akbar Khan, since his father Amir Dost Mohammed Khan was in British custody and he did not want to anger the British. The tribal chiefs told Akbar Khan that now the British and their entourage were fair game. Wazir Akbar Khan pleaded with them to no avail. That is the reason why Akbar Khan did try to save as many British lives as he could.

In spite of this I want to thank the author and SOF for bringing out an event in history which was

unfortunately repeated by the Soviets. The article overall serves to do this, but, it also shows the Afghans as uncivilized savages who cannot be trusted, although most probably not intentionally.

Please continue your great work in covering the Afghan struggle. Robert K. Brown, SOF, and the contributing writers are the best friends the Afghan People have in the media in the United States.

Farid Ghilzai
Fremont, California

RETURN FIRE...

Sirs:

Nearly as spellbinding as "Earth Vs. The Flying Saucers," Hollywood's latest "Vet-bashing" epic is the scummy tale of a LRRP unit's abduction, rape and murder of a village girl (adapted from a 1969 account by some hack named Daniel Lang, whose piece provided filler for the *New Yorker*). One wonders whether inspiration reached him deep in the bush or in the smokey confines of the Caravelle Bar (where "Remington Raiders" were known to bag their "exclusives"). But no matter. My "casualties" were the 11 bucks I had to shell out for my wife and me to endure this propaganda.

Sean Penn's "Toidy-toid-and-toid" delivery (garbled out through wads of Skoal) was narrowly edged to barrel's bottom by Michael J. Fox's quivering wimp portrayal of a subordinate who gazes blankly at the setting sun as the flock of dastardly GIs have their brutal way with the damsel. This "reel" Vietnam should have liberals slithering for the exits amid tears and gnashing of teeth.

Why Brian De Palma scraped up this sordid story for his multi-million dollar project is less suspect than the motives of the financiers who coughed up the bread for this "Son of Platoon" (it should be so "lucky").

"Casualties..." most likely will be in the Oscar hunt come April (check upcoming covers of *TIME* for required exposure) but 'Nam vets and supporters take heart... no "Lalaland" moguls' celluloid slime can mortally wound men and women better than they. De Palma

Continued on page 85

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IN the fall of 1983 Uncle Sam sent a bunch of us on a Caribbean vacation. Being the promoters of underdeveloped nations that we are, a relatively unknown tropical paradise was picked for this little foray — Grenada.

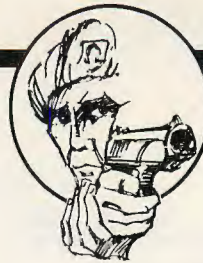
I worked my way through my island vacation as the NCOIC (Non-Commissioned Officer-In-Charge) of the U.S. Forces Grenada, Captured Weapons, Documents and Equipment Section. We were responsible for cataloging, identifying, and loading-out all the official "souvenirs" that Uncle Sam wanted to take home. The idea was to get everything of military value off the island as quickly as possible. Therefore we had some of the technical intelligence boys from Aberdeen and some Army stevedores to help.

The weapons warehouse soon became a collection point for duds and loose ammo found on the island. We separated the duds from the good ammo and ended up putting most of the duds on one work bench. Now this bench was about four feet wide and about 10 feet long. On it we had dud grenades (ours and theirs), PG-7s, LAWs (just the rockets), 20mm, 30mm, .50 cal and some stuff I'm still not sure what it was. Right next to it we had a few cases of a European-style block explosive that was so old it was turning to powder. Scattered throughout the rest of the warehouse were cases of small arms ammo and mortar shells. These mortar shells were 60mm ChiCom in little metal three-round carrying cases.

One time we went for 72 hours straight loading a ship. The only rest the Army stevedores had was when they were rotated down to work on the ship, chaining vehicles and crates down. I bounced back and forth between the ship and the warehouse with my boss to make sure everything kept moving.

In the weapons warehouse we'd *cleaned the last* of the weapons out. After the first day all that was left was the EOD (Explosive Ordnance Disposal) nightmare table and some ammunition. We had warned all the troops to stay away from the stuff on the table. We were afraid that someone would drop something and would cause it to go off as the designer intended. So whenever one of the troops wandered too near the table people noticed and showed concern by yelling something to the effect of, "Soldier, you were told to stay the fuck away from that table."

Inevitably, one poor curious soul approached the table with a couple of buddies. I was facing away and didn't notice anything until I heard someone say, "Put it down." I turned and one of the MPs had his weapon half-raised to his shoulder. Then the soldiers at the



I WAS THERE

Text & Photos by Jean V. Dubois

Grenada's Grenade Geek

Scene outside the captured weapons warehouse in Grenada. Everything from Soviet SKSs to British Lee-Enfields and even a B-10 rocket launcher were captured and shipped stateside.



Uniforms and clothing captured at Fort Fredrick and Rupert were dumped in front of the captured weapons warehouse and souvenir hunters were allowed to search for booty to take home.

dud table turned around. I could see that one of them had a Soviet F-1 fragmentation grenade in his hand. By this time the MP had decided it wouldn't be a good idea to shoot the idiot. I and a couple of other NCOs started moving toward him telling him not to move and to just stand still. His buddies were just standing there turning whiter by the second. I was about eight feet from him when I heard the crack of the fuse igniting. I turned and dived behind the first pile of anything I could find. Meanwhile the spoon had flown from the

grenade and the detonator went off but, without anyone noticing the body of the grenade had fallen off. When that happened you could have heard a pin drop inside the warehouse. Everyone was looking in the direction of the noise. I very softly said, "Get out!" And soon all you could see were assholes and elbows.

I could see the MP was probably regretting his decision not to shoot this dummy. He was standing there in shock — with his thumb and part of his hand peeled open to the bone where the detonator had gone off. A munitions expert from the MI (Military Intelligence) folks was going over the floor sweeping up shards from the fuse. Another was trying to figure out the circle of detonation to make sure there was not going to be a secondary cookoff from something.

I grabbed our would-be EOD expert and dragged him outside before he could find another toy. I threw him at the first NCO from his unit I could find with instructions to check out how badly he was injured.

When I got back inside one of the munitions NCOs asked me if I felt protected where I had dived. I returned the question with a "Huh?" and an appropriately stupid look on my face. He then pointed where I had dived when the fuse lit. When I looked we both started laughing. I had taken cover behind a stack of very old and rusty 60mm mortar shells. It may have felt safe but if there had been a large explosion it would have guaranteed that I go from this world to the next without stopping to collect \$200.

Our would-be EOD expert was sent to the evac hospital at the airfield. His hand and body had absorbed all the fragments from the fuse assembly. If he had been facing the table the fragments could have started a chain reaction that was not nuclear but enough to put all of us out of this world.

To no one's disappointment he was not seen again. We still had a few more days work sorting out the various other supplies and documents. But I don't think we ever got everything off the island. Anybody want a good deal on genuine buried treasure map?

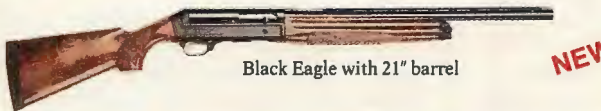


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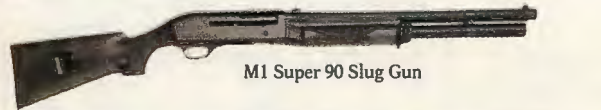
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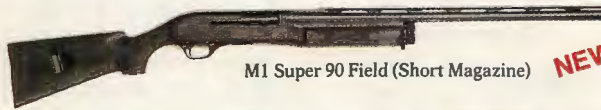


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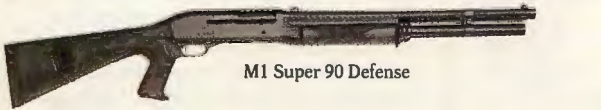


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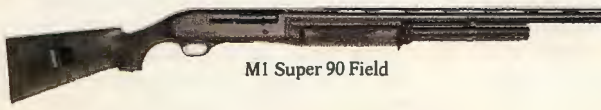


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NEW



M1 Super 90 Defense



M1 Super 90 Field



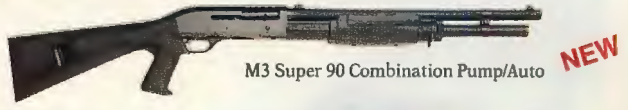
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In a world of compromise, some don't.

COLT'S "MINI" SMG

Since SOF's article on the Colt 9mm submachine gun appeared in the March 1987 issue, I have seen no further mention of this weapon. Is it still in production? Have any other models been developed?

Richard Cornblum
Toronto, Canada

A single prototype of a shortened version of the Colt 9mm Parabellum SMG (a direct spin-off of the M16 series) has been developed for Department of Energy (DOE) couriers. The barrel, which has no muzzle device, is approximately 6.4 inches in length and is almost completely enveloped by the handguards. There is a large folding front sight with front sling swivels on each side of the sight base and under the barrel. Another sling swivel has been attached to the front of the magazine-well. A short nylon sling between this latter swivel and the bottom front swivel serves as a wrist strap for the support hand. There is also a case deflector to the rear of the ejection port. In all other regards this prototype appears to be identical to the standard Colt 9mm SMG. It was designed as a "bag gun," to be carried in a Kevlar/Cordura pouch. It has been reported that 5,000 rounds were fired through the prototype, with no service or maintenance, and that there were no stoppages. No other information is currently available on this interesting firearm. The muzzle blast and flash probably border on the objectionable.

FULL-AUTO AK-47 CONVERSIONS



There have been numerous comments in the media that carry the clear implication that semiautomatic Kalashnikovs can be converted in a matter of minutes to full-auto fire with no more than a hand file. Even the President of the United States has picked up on this. Is this true?

Mark Cefaly
Atlanta, Georgia

Importation of these firearms was approved by the BATF only after it determined that, in fact, the rifles were



FULL AUTO

by Peter G. Kokalis

Mr. Machine Gun's Mailbag

not readily convertible to full-auto fire. Numerous import applications were denied until the importer submitted specimens to the BATF's Technical Services Department that complied with this requirement to the BATF's complete satisfaction.

If time and effort are of no consequence, any firearm, even a lever-action rifle, can be converted to fully automatic fire. Converting a semiautomatic-only AK to automatic fire requires a great deal of skill and knowledge and no small amount of effort and equipment. Without being too specific, the procedure is more or less as follows:

1) A portion of the receiver must be modified. A hole through each side of the receiver (larger on one side than the other) must be precisely located (to within 0.015") and drilled to accept the axis pin for the auto safety sear and its coil spring. This special coil spring also retains the hammer and trigger pins. If not installed correctly, the hammer and trigger axis pins will not be retained, and these components will fall out of the receiver. A slot must also be carefully milled into the rightside bolt-carrier rail to accept the auto safety sear. The three new components required are not easily procured or fabricated.

2) The hammer must be built up by welding and then with great skill re-shaped to provide a notch not present on the semiautomatic-only version.

3) An extension must be added at the rear of the sear by welding and then re-shaped to contact the selector lever.

4) A portion of the selector-lever stop on the rightside exterior of the receiver must be removed and another detent milled into the receiver for the new semiauto position.

5) The bolt carrier must be built up by welding and then re-shaped to actuate the auto safety sear.

If the welded components are not subsequently and properly heat-treated, wear will be accelerated and these parts will fail in a short period of time, often with dangerous con-

sequences. Furthermore, if this conversion is performed on an AKM type with a sheet-metal receiver, failure to install a completely unavailable five-component, anti-bounce mechanical drag device on the hammer (especially if the firing pin is not spring-retracted) will probably result in a disastrous ignition out of battery.

Finally, and most important of all, there are, and have been for 55 years, severe federal laws prohibiting such unauthorized conversions and mandating harsh penalties, including both imprisonment and heavy fines.

M16 BARREL LIFE

What is the approximate number of rounds that can be fired through government-issue M16 barrels of 1:12" and 1:7" twist? What barrel life can I expect from an aftermarket M16 barrel with 1:9" twist?

W. Barrett Geiger
Erdenheim, Pennsylvania

Maintenance procedures, propellant type, chrome plating, firing modes and cooling intervals all have a significant effect on barrel life. High temperatures accelerate wear. Bore temperatures should be kept well below 500 degrees C. Intervals between 120- to 150-round firing cycles should be determined by the cooling of the barrel, which must be such that it is capable of being held by the bare hand.

Chrome plating the chamber and bore can add substantially to the barrel's useful life span. Thickness of the chrome plating in the M16A2's chamber is 0.0005" and increases to 0.001" in the bore. However, this is of the so-called "beauty," or soft, chrome type. M249 SAW barrels are plated with a more wear-resistant "engineering" hard chrome. MilSpec 1:7" and 1:12" twist soft chrome M16 barrels should provide acceptable accuracy for approximately 10,000 rounds, if fired principally in the semiautomatic mode. Aftermarket

M16/AR15 replacement barrels are usually not chrome plated and will degrade more quickly.

COLT "OM" SPRINGS, PLUGS & MAGAZINES



After firing fewer than 500 rounds of factory hardball through my Colt .45 ACP Officer's Model pistol, the retaining projection on the recoil spring plug sheared off and the plug and recoil spring sailed into the sunset. Can this problem be corrected? Furthermore, I have noticed that the rear of the guide rod is peening that portion of the frame which it contacts. Are the Colt double-nested recoil springs too weak? Finally, does anyone manufacture aftermarket six-round magazines for the Colt Officer's ACP models and have you tested any of them?

Mark Yuen
Phoenix, Arizona

I am painfully concluding that the Colt "OM," an excellent concept, is seriously flawed in execution. Pistolsmith Richard Heinie (Dept. SOF, 821 East Adams, Havana, IL 62644; phone: 309-543-4535) manufactures a recoil spring plug for the "OM" with a retaining lip that covers at least 220 degrees of the plug's circumference. It will not part company from the slide. The slide must be modified before Heinie's plug can be fitted. The price, completely installed, is \$45 and includes a Wolff 22-pound recoil spring.

However, I recommend the Wolff extra power 24-pound spring with hardball ammunition loaded hotter than factory specifications. These springs should be replaced every 1,000 rounds or less and this should prevent damage to the frame. They must not be used with buffers of any type as the spring compresses almost to solid. Spare springs can be purchased from the Wolff Company (Dept. SOF, P.O. Box 232, Ardmore, PA 19003; phone: 215-896-7500 — catalog \$2). Together with an extra power firing pin spring, they cost \$7.20

per set.

Pachmayr® (Dept. SOF, 1875 South Mountain Ave., Monrovia, CA 91016; phone: 818-357-7771) manufactures a line of magazines for the Colt 1911 series pistols, including the compact Officer's (.45) ACP Models. The stainless steel bodies have modified feed lips and convex followers to improve functioning with all bullet shapes. They are equipped with black neoprene bumper pads to insure positive seating and protection for magazines dumped on the ground during speed reloading. SOF fired 600 rounds through two of these "OM" magazines and experienced no stoppages. The suggested retail price is \$26.95 each. I can recommend all these modifications and products from personal experience as they have been incorporated on both of my Colt "OMs".

MP5 MAGAZINE POUCH

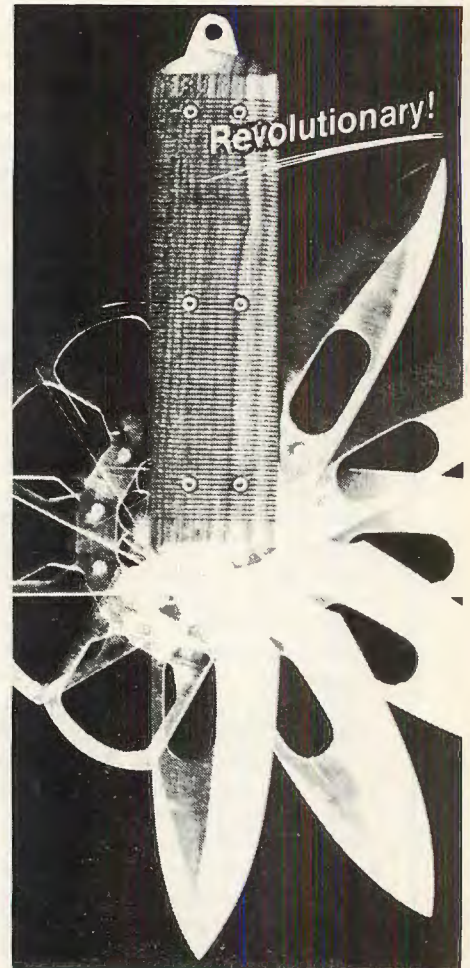


Webb pouches that hold three or four submachine gun magazines are designed for military LBE. They are too large for concealment. Has anyone designed a single-magazine pouch for bodyguard and law enforcement applications?

Bill Allen
Chicago, Illinois

Bruce Nelson Combat Leather (Dept. SOF, P.O. Box 8691 CRB, Tucson, AZ 85738 — catalog \$3) has recently introduced a single-magazine pouch for the ubiquitous Heckler & Koch MP5 30-round magazine. Hand precision molded to securely retain the MP5 magazine's curved contour, the design and execution are up to the high standards set by all of Nelson's combat rigs. The magazine rides in this open pouch (worn on the weak side) with the floorplate facing down and the

Continued on page 83



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by
Francis Boyd

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MORE than half of the 7,000 ZANLA guerrillas had fled their positions at Chimoio in Mozambique during the first of the Rhodesian air strikes. The several thousand remaining in the extensive trench and bunker network were, however, able to count only seven para-troop-carrying Dakota (C-47) aircraft and knew they had an enormous numerical advantage. Maintaining a heavy volume of antiaircraft fire against successive air attackers, the defenders waited for the thin ranks of ground troops to close on their lines.

Typically, with 20 soldiers spread out at 10-meter intervals with the only depth provided by a three-man command group, a sweep line would not normally be the best formation to attack a fortified position, even with the best possible close-in air support. Yet the few paratroopers seen moving in the distance appeared to be in just such formations.

Advancing cautiously through the lush green November bush, the men of the Rhodesian Special Air Service approached the perimeter of the terrorist base from several directions. Helmeted, with bayonets fixed, they presented a formidable sight, but there were only seven planeloads — at most 150 of them. No problem for the waiting thousands — or so they thought.

First shots were exchanged, and then a firestorm erupted from the SAS skirmishers. Sheets of tracers lashed the terrorist positions, hitting human targets, spinning and hissing in the dirt, flashing into bunker gunports. Instant confusion broke out in the trenches around Chimoio base, and within minutes the defenses had collapsed at several critical points. The SAS quickly exploited their penetration and by the end of the battle, over a thousand of Robert Mugabe's finest were out of the war for good.

How could so few attackers rout such a vastly numerically superior force of well entrenched defenders? There are a number of factors, of course. The Rhodesian Air Force, though very small in size, was superb in quality and kept delivering destruction on the base despite heavy ground fire which eventually hit every aircraft flown in the raid. The SAS were unquestionably the best troops in southern Africa, while ZANLA's guerrillas were ill-trained and badly motivated, although very well equipped. Feeling secure in their trenches, most stayed until the hail of visible bullets burst amongst them. Seeking every possible advantage, SAS officers had ordered their riflemen to load magazines with a mix of 1 tracer to 2 ball rounds, and SAS machine gunners to increase their ratio to the same one-in-three. As far as the terrorists were concerned, there



COMBAT WEAPONCRAFT

by Robert MacKenzie

Tracking Tracers



were more bullets around them than could be accounted for, so they displayed their usual behavior when confronted with a surprise: sprint away at full speed, firing their AKs over the shoulder. So collapsed the largest ZANLA guerrilla base in Mozambique.

Tracers are traditionally only found in the belts of machine guns. However, possible uses of tracer ammunition in small arms extend far beyond normally accepted applications. As can be seen from this account of the Chimoio raid, the technique of using a heavy mix of tracer ammo as a force multiplier in the attack can have a considerable psychological effect — in some cases enough to destroy enemy morale and cohesiveness. In defense, a heavy weight of tracer can deter even the most stalwart of attackers, understandably reluctant to advance through lethal and visible barriers. And when used in defense against air attack, they not only increase the accuracy of anti-aircraft fire, but also can cause pilots to break off their strikes prematurely.

How else can tracers be used? As incendiary projectiles, as markers for individual fire control or air strike target identification, as magazine load status indicators, or even as illumination supplements in night action.

However, when considering the use of tracer ammo in battle planning, an important factor is the possibility that the firer will be detected by the tracers he is using. Indeed, there are some situations where this factor will preclude any but ball rounds. A probably

more important aspect is the dryness of the vegetation that one is planning to operate in and the possibility that brush fires might disrupt those operations. That same dryness obviously could be used to advantage if one is hoping to burn off an enemy position sited in thick, dry brush. Of course some flexibility can be obtained by instructing troops to load and segregate some magazines or belts with a tracer-heavy ratio, only to be used on command if the situation warrants.

A more specific focus of the incendiary value of tracer ammo can be directed against targets such as POL (petroleum-oil-lubricant) storage facilities. In another incident drawn from the Rhodesian war, a force of SAS destroyed Mozambique's largest fuel dump with small arms and rocket fire. Using tracer-heavy mix with ball and armor-piercing rounds, SAS machine gunners were able to ignite gasoline tanks which spectacularly erupted into flame after only a few bursts. Parked aircraft and some thin-skinned vehicles can be equally dramatically destroyed by rifle-caliber tracer rounds used deliberately as incendiaries.

Commonly used to indicate targets to other infantry or supporting armor, tracers can also mark for aircraft. They are not as effective during daylight as are other methods, though, and should be avoided except as a field expedient. A technique described in *The Devil's Bodyguard* has a legitimate application in some circumstances. That technique is to clandestinely site two machine guns approximately 600 meters from the target (you must know the range at which your tracers burn out!) and separated by several hundred meters from each other. On the approach of friendly strike planes the guns open fire over the target and the pilot delivers his load where the streams of tracers converge. This works much better at night than during the day when pilots need a stronger marker.

When conducting fire-and-movement to close on an enemy it is imperative that skirmishers rush for-

Continued on page 71

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ALTHOUGH we spotlighted this book in last month's Bulletin Board, **The Official Vietnam War Trivia Book** by Alan Dawson certainly bears further mention.

In four words: It's great, buy it.

Here are just a few samples from Dawson's 130 pages of things you knew, or should've known if you were paying attention:

- How many poncho liners were issued to troops in the field, and why?
- Those big orange pills did two things to you. Name them both.
- Name the worst beer in the Nam.
- What's the PCOD?
- What were B-52 bombing missions called?
- Who coined the phrase, "Find the bastards then pile on"?

Now, we suppose you think we're going to give you the answers. Not even, GI. Sin Loi. But you can find them in this informative and downright funny jaunt through Vietnam's memory lane for a mere \$5.95 plus \$2 p&h from ESE Ltd., 7911 West Road, Dept. SOF, Houston, TX 77064.

DEFCON ONE. By Joe Weber. Presidio Press, Dept. SOF, 31 Pamaron Way, Novato, CA 94949. 1989. Hardcover. 336 pages. Fiction. \$18.95. Review by John Coleman.

I took **DEFCON One** home with the idea that it would give me a weekend's worth of good reading. I was wrong. It gave me five straight hours of cover-to-cover excitement, and left me wishing for more.

DEFCON One (chopped version of Defense Condition One — forces deployed for war) is a supercharged techno/political/military/spy thriller that has a post-glasnost megalomaniacal Soviet leader plotting to bring the USSR and United States to the brink of war, back off, then launch a surprise nuclear-biological-chemical attack.

Author and former Marine pilot Weber builds a chilling but all too plausible scenario based on a crumbling Soviet empire and a handful of its leaders who see their only way out as provok-

Just as we were going to press we heard about two books that merit your immediate attention. **BROWN WATER, BLACK BERETS** by Lt. Cmdr. Thomas J. Cutler, USN (Pocket Books, Dept. SOF, 1230 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10020. \$4.95), and **PRISONERS OF A DREAM** by Leo Raditsa (Prince George Street Press, Dept. SOF, P.O. Box 252,

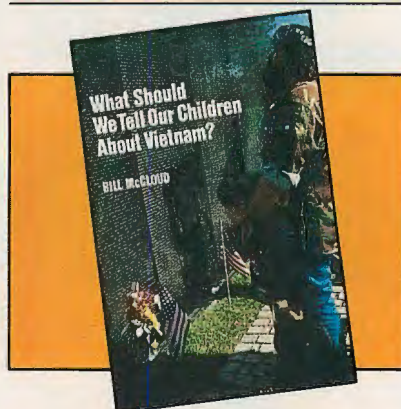
IN REVIEW



ing a "win-able" nuclear war. Beginning with military thrusts and jabs resulting in aerial and naval shootouts and ending with fingers poised precariously over the button, Weber weaves a fine tail of suspense interspersed with some of the best combat writing you'll find on the bookshelves today.

If you're not edge-of-the-chair toward the book's end, especially during the bold rescue attempt of two CIA operatives deep inside the Soviet Union, then you've been sniffing too much AvGas.

As we mentioned last month, Presidio Press rates our top billing as best military publisher, and first-rate works such as **DEFCON One** will certainly keep 'em there.



WHAT SHOULD WE TELL OUR CHILDREN ABOUT VIETNAM? By Bill McCloud. The University of Oklahoma Press, Dept. SOF, 1005 Asp Avenue, Norman, OK 73019. 1989. Hardcover. 155 pages. \$17.95. Review by John Coleman.

V IETNAM vet and junior high school teacher Bill McCloud was putting together a course outline for teaching his students about Vietnam,

and decided to send out letters to military officers, politicians, scholars, journalists, former POWs, protestors and scores of others involved in the war asking, "What do you think are the most important things for today's junior high school students to understand about the Vietnam War?"

"It was as if they were waiting to be asked the question," McCloud says.

Responses poured in from a Who's Who of the war: George Bush, Philip Caputo, William Colby, Clark Clifford, J. William Fulbright, Barry Goldwater, Alex Haig, Morton Halperin, Tom Hayden, Ken Kesey, Henry Kissinger, G. Gordon Liddy, Robert S. McNamara, Thomas Moorer, George Patton, Nicholas Proffitt, Dean Rusk, Pete Seeger, Shelby Stanton, Kurt Vonnegut, James Webb, William Westmoreland, E.R. Zumwalt, and numerous other key players.

McCloud has selected 128 of the letters most representative of the differing viewpoints on Vietnam, and from these responses also gleaned the most recurrent themes into 13 lessons learned, of which here are a few:

- Our cause was just, maybe even noble, because we entered the war for moral, unselfish reasons;
- The United States never fielded better armies;
- Nevertheless, the war was probably a mistake;
- We must not engage in war without a total commitment to win;
- The United States learned that there are limits to its power in a nuclear age.

As the decades roll on and history is revised to suit those who will write it up, books such as this will become an important record of the thoughts, feelings and emotions of those who helped shape our national conscience on Vietnam.

And, perhaps most importantly, it's a succinct primer on how not to run things the next time around — if we're wise enough to learn.

Annapolis, MD 21404. \$25.95).

Brown Water, Black Berets brings to light (at long last) the role of the U.S. Navy and Coast Guard who served in-country fighting along Vietnam's coast and along its waterways. Excellent early reviews, and we'll give you ours next month.

Prisoners Of A Dream uses the quickly buried Senate hearings chaired by Jeremiah Denton in March 1982 on

"The Role of the Soviet Union, Cuba and East Germany in Fomenting Terrorism in Southern Africa" as a grounding for an in-depth analysis of that politically and militarily turbulent — and definitely misunderstood — strategic part of the world. One reviewer wrote, "After this, there will be no need for the American public to go on being deceived. For here is the reality, at last." Our review upcoming. ✎

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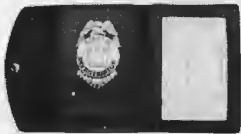
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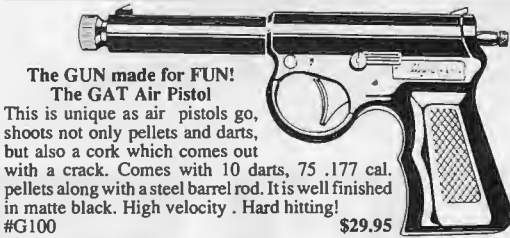
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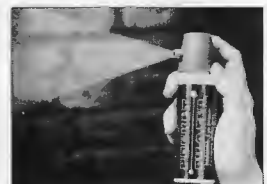


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- #7110 SOF Ashtray, white with red logo. **\$5.95**
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- #7120 Stein. 12-oz., clear with red logo. **\$7.50**



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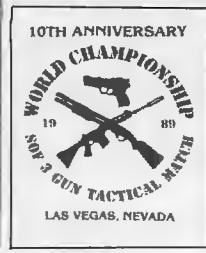


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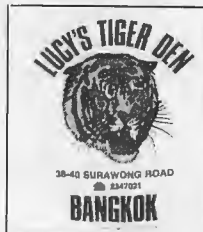
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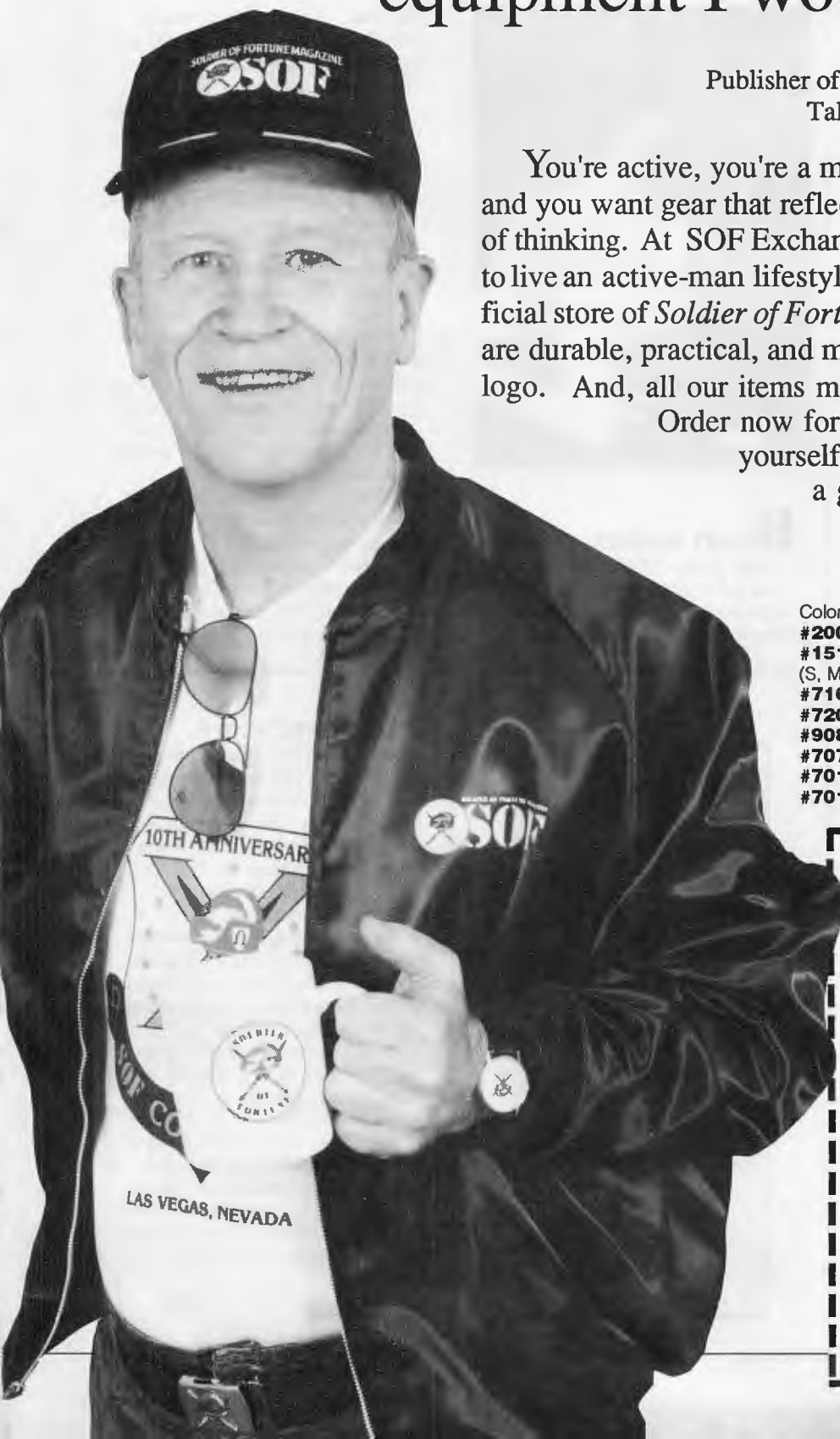
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INCOMING

Too many new products and too little space have prompted *Adventure Quartermaster* to include a few brief comments on items not given detailed treatment. You'll find ordering information for these goodies elsewhere in the mag with the manufacturers' ads (see *Advertisers Index* for help).

Sometimes you need to zap someone who threatens assault and battery without making it permanent. That's where Safetex Enterprises' 60,000 volt stun gun comes in handy. It's non-lethal but grounds your opponent — fast. Just \$39.95 check or money order; oddly enough, they don't take charge cards.

Go get your message out with Talking Tops' line of t-shirts, sweats and hats aimed at getting your point across to anti-gunners everywhere. This assumes the gun grabbers are out, not cowering at home watching the statistics on armed robbery.

Fire Power, Incorporated's new Military-Science catalog is loaded with hundreds of technical publications including "Silent Ammunition." Learn how to make any caliber rifle or handgun shoot quietly, plus lots more.

Tom Clancy's novels, *Red Storm Rising* and *The Hunt for Red October*, have been turned into strategy board games by TSR, Inc. The games do not follow the action in the books but instead allow players to fight WW III on land and sea, respectively. Not overly complex but a heck of a lot of fun.

Looking for something in the Swiss Army/Survival Knife arena? Check out Jason Marketing's newest offering featuring 15 precision tools and blades, or their \$12.95 walnut-handled lock-blade.

Controversial "Battle of Algiers," videotape is again available, this time from Axon Video. It won 11 prestigious international awards and runs 125 minutes while costing only \$29.95.

ADVENTURE QUARTERMASTER



by Tom Slizewski



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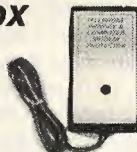
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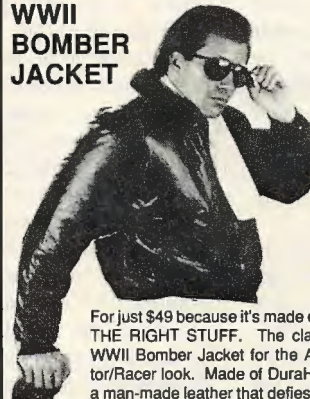
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CASULL'S CANNON

Freedom Arms .454 Limited Production Magnum

Text & Photos by Peter Kokalis

POWER, in all of its many forms, seems to be an American obsession. Whether it be wealth, authority, automobiles or firearms, we want the most and the biggest. When it comes to firearms, big bores and faster bullets have always held the greatest allure for us. In the area of handguns, a strong case can be built for bores of large diameter.

Introduced by Colt in 1873 for its "Peacemaker" single-action revolver, the .45 Long Colt (LC) cartridge helped civilize the Old West. Both were adopted by the U.S. Army in 1875. They reigned for 17 years until replaced by the pathetic .38 Long Colt. Originally a black powder round, the .45 LC is still a favorite of big-bore boomers after more than a century.

Dick Casull has been launching high velocity missiles from .45 LC barrels since 1953. His 230-grain bullets approached 2,000 fps with triplex loads consisting of layered charges of Hercules Unique, 2400 and Bullseye. Unfortunately, Casull's efforts were overshadowed by the arrival in 1955 of Smith & Wesson's Model 29 .44 Magnum.

But Casull refused to let go of his dream, and in 1983 his .45 Long Colt Magnum revolver was finally placed into series production by Freedom Arms (Dept. SOF, P.O. Box 1776, Freedom, WY 83120; phone: 307-883-2468). Called the .454 Casull, it has been referred to as the world's most powerful production revolver, whatever that means. Noted for its superb quality and awesome recoil, the Casull single-action revolver can almost be considered a custom-made, production-series firearm as no more than a couple of dozen are painstakingly hand-fitted and produced each day. Such efforts are not provided for mere pennies, and the price of a Premier Grade

Casull, at \$1,149.75, will set you back more than its recoil.

However, in an attempt to dampen the shock and broaden the appeal, a so-called "Field Grade" model has now been made available at a cost of \$929 — still nothing to sneeze at, but only \$200 more than some of today's stamped and welded "wonder nines." The Field Grade Casull features a bead-blasted, matte finish that cuts four to five hours from the finishing time and synthetic, but still hand-fitted, grip panels instead of the smooth, resin-impregnated laminate of cherrywood (also known as Pacawood) found on the Premier Grade. Feeling it might be a vicarious substitute for combat, SOF decided to test one of these beasts in the "packing pistol" 4¾-inch barrel length.

Freedom Arms' barrels are fabricated from #416 stainless crucible barrel steel heat-treated to 35 C on the Rockwell scale. The groove diameter is .452 inch, nominal (prior to World War II, Colt revolvers in this caliber had a groove diameter of .454 inch). Bullets should be sized to .451 inch. To properly stabilize the heavy 240- to 300-grain bullets commonly employed in this revolver, the six-groove bores have a right-hand twist with only one turn in 24 inches, somewhat slower than the 1:16 inch twist usually found on .45 LC barrels. Other available standard barrel lengths are 6 inches, 7½ inches (far and away the most popular) and 10 inches (any barrel length up to 12 inches is available on special order).

Overall length of our test specimen was 12 inches. Its weight, empty, was 3 pounds, 1 ounce. That's a handful of steel and with good reason, as any significant increase in mass provides greater inertia to absorb recoil and reduce stress to the system's components. Still, it's only a few ounces more



than a Ruger Super Blackhawk.

Pressures with Freedom Arms factory ammunition can hover around 55,000 c.u.p. (copper units of pressure). Few modern rifles exceed this. As a result, the unfluted cylinder has but five chambers with the web between chambers at 0.26 inch and 0.235 inch to the outer surface. The massive cylinder measures 1.75 inches in diameter and 1.77 inches in overall length. For added



Rolling back in full recoil, the mighty .454 Casull's kick can be tolerated by experienced pistolers, but never tamed.

strap to the loading gate after re-cocking. If you then first lower the hammer to the half-cock or hammer-down safety positions, you can eject the empty case and reload without disturbing the revolver's rotation cycle.

Except for the barrel, sight blades and springs, all other components of the .454 Casull revolver are fabricated from 17-4 PH (Precipitating Hardness) stainless steel. The grip frame and receiver, manufactured as mill-finished investment castings, are attached together with the traditional five screws, which should occasionally be checked for loosening.

The grip frame's configuration exhibits excellent human engineering and yet retains the classic appearance of an early Colt percussion revolver. We chose the optional, resin-impregnated Pacawood smooth grip panels for our test and evaluation as they permit the revolver to roll upward during recoil. Any attempt to over-control the .454 Casull's recoil and muzzle whip would be foolish and counterproductive.

This is a single-action revolver and the hammer must be manually pulled back to full cock before a shot is fired. Casull revolvers are normally equipped with four- to five-pound trigger pull weights. We specified the optional honed action, and our test revolver was sent to us with a clean-breaking, crisp trigger pull weight of only 2¾ pounds. That's a bit too low for any but the most experienced pistoleros.

There are four hammer positions, including full cock. After firing, the hammer will be all the way forward against the striker plate. The revolver should not be carried loaded in this position even though there is a unique sliding bar safety system. This safety mechanism is significantly different from the transfer bar safety found on most other modern revolvers, as a separate transfer bar does not rise to shield the firing pin when the hammer is cocked. Instead, the Casull's safety lever impinges directly upon the hammer, camming rearward as the hammer is cocked and blocking the hammer until the trigger is deliberately squeezed and held rearward.

The hammer can be manually placed into a safety position approximately 1/16 inch to 1/8 inch from the striker face. In this position, the hammer is held safely away from the floating firing pin by the safety bar.

Finally, the hammer can be placed approximately halfway back into the half-cock position. This depresses the cylinder locking bolt into the frame, leaving the cylinder free to rotate for loading and unloading the chambers. Due to spring tension on the cylinder hand, you will feel a resistance to rotating the cylinder and will hear an audible click as the hand drops into each ratchet notch. To rotate the cylinder, the hammer must be brought to half cock from the fully forward position or the cylinder lock lever will not release the cylinder. To load or

strength, the locking recesses into which the bolt fits when the hammer is at full cock are located between the chambers. Each cylinder is fit and locked to the frame it is to be mated with before it is chambered. This type of line-boring results in almost perfect barrel-to-cylinder alignment as each chamber is fired. Chamber throats are tight and are held to a tolerance of only 0.0002 inch. Industry standards for barrel cylinder gap

are 0.003 inches to 0.008 inch. Barrel cylinder gap at each chamber of our test specimen was an incredible 0.0015 inch. However, there is a trade-off for such close tolerances; you must keep a .454 Casull revolver scrupulously clean to avoid cylinder binding during rotation.

As cylinder rotation is clockwise, an added benefit of a five-shot cylinder is that an empty case moves directly from the top

unload from half cock, the loading gate must be swung outward. To unload, push back on the spring-loaded ejector rod to eject the cartridges or empty cases. Never press the trigger while the hammer is in the half-cock position as this can damage the trigger mechanism.

The revolver should never be fired without a loaded cartridge or empty case under the loading gate as this prevents high pressure gas from passing through the empty chamber and opening the loading gate. In addition, it should never be dry-fired without an empty case or snap cap in the chamber to prevent damage to the gas-proof fir-

ing pin. Caliber .45 snap caps with replaceable nylon inserts are available from Freedom Arms.

To remove the cylinder for cleaning or inspection, first place the hammer in the half-cock position with the cylinder free to rotate. Open the loading gate and make sure the chambers are empty. Remove the screw on the side of the cylinder axis pin which prevents the axis pin from jumping forward during recoil. Slide the axis pin toward the muzzle. Remove the cylinder from the loading gate side of the revolver with a rolling clockwise motion, being careful not to scratch or damage the cylinder. To re-install

the cylinder use the reverse procedure, making sure the hammer is in the half-cock position and that you have lubricated the cylinder axis pin in addition to the other components.

Both the front and rear sights are black-oxide finished to minimize glare. Fixed and adjustable rear sights are available. When it is anticipated that bullets of varying weights and velocities will be employed, the adjustable rear sight should be chosen. Thankfully, there are no useless white outlines or colored inserts on either the front or rear sights. The serrated, ramp-type front sight blade is 0.125-inch thick with a 1/4 inch vertical step at the rear end. Although not designed for this purpose, the vertical step can be used to compensate for bullet drop at extremely long ranges. The allen-head set screw retaining the front sight blade should also be periodically checked for looseness. The rear sight, with a 0.125-inch open square notch can be adjusted for both elevation and windage by means of a small screwdriver. The rear sight's edges are as sharp as a razor and will slash a leather holster flap or your hands to shreds. Dehorning this component should be a standard factory feature.

Overall, the quality of manufacture is superb. No handgun is built to closer tolerances. The amount of hand-fitting required, even in the Field Grade version, is far beyond that of any current production series firearm. And yet, this is one mean mother, designed for a cartridge that will challenge the shooter to the maximum extent with every pull of the trigger.

At 1.385 inches, the .454 Casull straight-walled, rimmed cartridge case is 1/10 inch longer than the .45 LC case (1.285 inches). It is precisely by this amount that the .357 Magnum case differs from the .38 Special and the .44 Magnum from the .44 Special. This is to preclude chambering ammunition into revolvers not designed to handle its increased pressures. Be advised, however, that you may be able to stuff a .454 Casull cartridge into some older Colt Single Action Army revolvers. With utter certainty approaching death and taxes, this would be disastrous.

Current Freedom Arms' cases are head-stamped "454 CASULL F-A" with increased thickness in the web area and with primer pockets now designed for small rifle primers. The Remington #7 1/2 Bench Rest primer is recommended, although any small rifle magnum primer will do. Older brass, headstamped "454 CASULL NAA," accepted large rifle primers.

There's nothing new about triplex or duplex powder charges. Layered charges have long been used in artillery munitions. However, they can be dangerous when concocted by amateur reloaders.

Casull's early results can now be more than duplicated by single-propellant loads of either Olin 296 or Hodgdon H110 (originally developed for the .30 M1 Carbine). Both are flattened ball types with approximately the same burning rates, and neither



Built to the closest possible tolerances, the .454 Casull revolver is, without doubt, the most powerful and most superbly hand-crafted production series handgun in the world.

.454 CASULL REVOLVER SPECIFICATIONS

- Caliber:**454 Casull (Premier Grade also available in .45 LC and .44 Magnum).
- Operation:**Five-shot revolver. Single-action only. Sliding bar safety system blocks hammer until trigger is deliberately squeezed and held rearward.
- Weight, empty:**Three pounds, one ounce.
- Length, overall:**12 inches (with 4 3/4-inch barrel).
- Width, overall:**1 3/4 inches.
- Barrel length:**4 3/4 inches (6", 7 1/2" and 10" also standard; up to 12" available on special order).
- Grip panels:**Synthetic, hand fitted.
- Sights:**Fixed, front and rear or adjustable rear.
- Finish:**Stainless steel. Field Grade features bead-blasted matte finish.
- Price:**Field Grade, \$929; Premier Grade, \$1,149.75.
- Manufacturer:**Freedom Arms, Dept. SOF, P.O. Box 1776, Freedom, WY 83120; Phone: 307-883-2468.
- T&E summary:**Manufactured to extremely close tolerances. Highest level of craftsmanship available in a production series handgun. Heavy recoil. Effective wound ballistics with factory ammunition. Principal applications: hunting and metallic silhouette competition.

Bruce Nelson's custom-made Kodiak hunting holster is ideal for packing the .454 Casull in the field. It can be worn in the shoulder position or on a belt in both strong side and cross-draw positions.

should be loaded to less than 90 percent case capacity. When using large, compressed charges of these propellants, you must secure the bullet in the case mouth with a heavy crimp to retain it long enough for peak pressures to develop and also to prevent bullets from jumping forward out of their case during recoil of the preceding round. Complete loading information is furnished with every .454 Casull revolver delivered from the factory.

Freedom Arms manufactures three different bullets for their revolver: a 240-grain Jacketed Hollow Point (JHP), 260-grain Jacketed Flat Point (JFP) and 300-grain JFP. To prevent excessive base deformation, swaging of the bullet by the forcing cone under firing pressures and to reduce fragmentation in the target, these bullets have a 0.32-inch thick copper alloy jacket (three times as thick as the average handgun bullet's jacket) and an extremely hard core, containing 10.75 percent tin/antimony alloy and 89.25 percent lead. If standard handgun projectiles are used at .454 Casull pressures and velocities, accuracy will suffer and they will usually break apart completely in the target shortly after impact, with consequent inadequate penetration.

Previous reports on the .454 Casull revolver and cartridge have emphasized its astounding velocity and muzzle energy accompanied by theatrical, but quite meaningless, "tests" fired into Duxseal, modeling clay, wood beams, steel plates, wet phone books, and paint cans and plastic jugs filled with water. All of these media will yield misleading information. Calculating a bullet's muzzle energy also provides useless information, as it tells us nothing about the bullet's performance in the target — i.e., whether or not it yaws, expands or fragments and how deeply it will penetrate. Furthermore, overemphasis on high velocities can, and often does, decrease effectiveness.

Admittedly, the .454 Casull's potential for self-defense is limited because of its single-action mechanism and heavy recoil (which will compromise target reacquisition). Most often it will be shot at game animals and steel chickens. However, regardless of whether the target is prey or predator, the principal mechanism of wounding, when it comes to living tissue, is the wound track itself. In terms of inflicting damage, the objective is to slice and dice as much as possible and as deeply as possible. To be effective, bullets must penetrate deeply enough to crush, cut and break through a living organism's vital structures and organs — be it man or Cape buffalo. Penetration remains the most important single parameter. Once the required penetration is obtained, the bullet that makes the biggest hole will do the most damage. That means we want a bullet in the largest caliber that can



be controlled by the shooter. And the .454 Casull brings us right up to the outer edge of controllability.

A 10 percent solution of ordnance gelatin (Type 250 A) reproduces the penetration depth measured in living swine leg muscle when used at 39° Fahrenheit (4° Centigrade). With our 4¾-inch test specimen, we tested five different loadings of .454 Casull ammunition in this tissue simulant, using the methodology developed by Dr. Martin L. Fackler, director of the U.S. Army's Wound Ballistics Lab at the Presidio of San Francisco.

Game Grabbers™ are the hunting equivalent of the Pin Grabbers™ ammunition manufactured by Kaswer Custom, Inc. (Dept. SOF, 13 Surrey Drive, Brookfield, CT 06804). Their common characteristic is a JHP projectile with six serrated teeth-like projections.

Game Grabbers with a 315-grain JHP bul-

let were driven downrange with an average velocity of 1,315 fps, 10 feet from the muzzle. When the bullets ended their travel point forward, penetration was more than 50 inches in soft tissue. However, *sometimes* they yawed 180 degrees and ended their travel base forward. Penetration then dropped to 33 inches. In either case, after just 4 inches of penetration all six of the teeth invariably broke away from the bullet in a symmetrical pattern. There was no expansion of the bullet body and the small teeth fragments will not do *much* damage.

Game Grabbers with a 260-grain soft core double jacket JHP bullet traveled with an average velocity of approximately 1,335 fps. The bullet usually yawed and ended its travel base forward. Penetration was about 33 inches. Once again, the teeth would always separate from the bullet with a fragmentation pattern

Continued on page 72

BAGH-I-ZAQIRA GARDEN PARTY



Muj Warriors

Bury Hatchet — Then Bury Reds

Text & Photos by Jake Border

BORDER WISDOM

Jake Border is a frequent SOF contributor who has filed stories from Burma ("Battle at Three Pagodas Pass," August '87), the Thai/Cambodian border ("Cambodian Recon," October '86) and Afghanistan (most recently, "Hard Road to Kandahar," November '88). Border has spent many months inside Afghanistan and has a good understanding of the complexities of Afghan politics. This article helps explain the jockeying for position that is taking place between different Afghan groups now that Soviet troops have left their country.

LEFT: Civilian house bombed by Soviet jets. Afghan women weep for dead.

RIGHT & BELOW: Muj load BM-1 rocket launcher in preparation for night bombardment (below) of Taloqan.





Central Units forces in Taloqan with street photographer. Note Rambo picture.



Government propaganda poster shot up by muj in Taloqan.

RUMORS of war, rumors of war, rumors of war. For nearly three weeks I'd been listening to various misinformed but well-intentioned mujahideen feeding me stories on when the attack was about to start; now I was listening to the Stones on my Walkman, relaxing in my sleeping bag.

Then, at precisely 2210 hours, a jeep pulled up outside. Without being told, I knew it was time to go. This was it. Although I'd been caught quite literally *with my pants down*, I was dressed in minutes and soon sweating inside my down vest under combat jacket, jammed alongside some muj armed not with assault rifles but video cameras — a Jamiat-i-Islami documentary crew. The trail was getting warmer.

So was I. Inside half an hour we were inside a sweltering room filled with mujahideen sprawled all over the floor, sleeping under the harsh blaze of a gas lantern, their assembled weapons casting hideous shadows across the walls.

No sooner was I sandwiched among these uniformly khaki-clad forms which identified them as the elite Central Units forces under the personal command of Ahmad Shah Massoud when I was summoned next door to meet with the commander himself.

Commander Massoud was sitting cross-legged on the floor with his flat-top Afghan

cap sitting characteristically askew on his head. He looked a little tense but otherwise surprisingly fit; only when the light struck his face from certain angles did his eyes betray the strain. With him were some bodyguards, his personal assistant (and interpreter for visiting journalists), Dr. Abdullah, and two top guns of the *Shura-i-Nazar* or Supervisory Council of the North, as the Jamiat political organization here is called.

These were Commander Arianpour, chief of the Northern Zone of the Council comprising the four provinces of Badakhshan, Kunduz, Baghlan and Tarkhar, and Commander Gadoh, leader of the four-party mujahideen alliance in Taloqan, provincial capital of Tarkhar.

This was no picnic gathering — it was a war-party, and Massoud briskly briefed me on the upcoming operation, deftly sketching out a map of the area showing enemy positions. Although the city of Taloqan was completely occupied by the four mujahideen parties Jamiat-i-Islami, Harakat-i-Inqilab-i-Islami and both the Khalis and Hekmatyar factions of Hezb-i-Islami, there existed a pocket of resistance dug in deep on the western outskirts of the city at a 30-

hectare public garden called Bagh-i-Zaqira. The Soviets pulled out of Taloqan on 12 August 1988 and by the end of the month the Afghan government administration capitulated and the mujahideen entered the city without firing a shot. According to an informant friend, a former senior official in the Department of Agriculture, prearranged signals and rendezvous points had been arranged for the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) members, who, on a given Saturday afternoon, simply vanished from their offices and were evacuated.

Most assembled at Bagh-i-Zaqira from where they were choppered out to the neighboring provincial capital, Kunduz. Having refused to join the party, my friend was ignorant of these maneuvers, and arrived to find his office deserted.

Five to six hundred hard-core defenders composed of elements of the regular army, Khad (the secret police) and the military police or Sarandoy stayed on at Bagh-i-Zaqira protected behind a 14-meter wide minefield (both trip-wire and pressure detonated types) and multiple barbed wire perimeter fences with at least two 122mm D-30 field guns, three 82mm mortars, three BTR-60 armored personnel carriers and several 12.7mm DShK HMGs and AGS-17 "plamya" 30mm automatic grenade launchers dubbed "sam-sam" by the muj.

On its own, Bagh-i-Zaqira would have been strategically isolated and easily taken by Massoud's Central Units, which had been rapidly and successfully bridging the gap between guerrilla and conventional warfare, but the Bagh defenders under Commander Naim Talosh had the advantage of flanking support.

In an arc stretching northeast from the Bagh to the foothills of the surrounding mountains was an extensive chain of fortifications ranging from armor-defended villages to small hilltop posts. Approximately 800 well-equipped militiamen under three main commanders were dug in here.

The first group under Wujkhun, about 60 men, occupied two hilltop posts about 1800 meters from Bagh-i-Zaqira and were beefed up with one T-55 battle tank, four BMP-1s and one BTR-60 armored personnel carrier.

The second group, of 150 men, under Allah Berdy ("God-given") were garrisoned in and around the village of Korji-in, to the northwest of Wujkhun.

The third group under Shah Mahmud aka Koori ("the blind") Mali, the main strength of these militia, were based in the village of Kazok (about 150 men) and a chain of smaller outposts (20-30 men each) that swept the northern flank of the city of Taloqan and continued into the mountains. Koori Mali's men were equipped with three BRDM recon vehicles, three 120mm mortars, five 82mm mortars, one 23mm ZU cannon, one 14.5mm ZKU HMG, one 12.7mm DShK HMG and some sam-sams. Koori Mali also had a chopper pad and was

receiving regular flights of Mi-8s bringing supplies and war material from Kunduz and Rustak, a district center further north also under militia control.

Although ostensibly Marxist oriented, the bias of these militia was more nationalist than doctrinaire, for all belonged to the Tajik, Uzbek (and to a lesser extent Turkoman) ethnic minorities of north Afghanistan which had formed a political front in Kabul to counter the traditional rivalry from the dominant Pashtuns, who have firmly held the reins of power in Afghanistan since its formal inception by the Durrani clan in 1747.

Initially there was a split within the Khalq faction of the PDPA which gave rise to the Setam, or Party for the Nationalities Under Oppression. This in turn split into moderate and radical factions, known as Saza and Safza respectively, both of which translate broadly as the Revolutionary Organization of Toilers of Afghanistan.

Koori Mali, a Tajik, belonged to the Saza and Wujkhun, an Uzbek, belonged to the Safza. Allah Berdy, also an Uzbek, remained independent as a militia commander under Khad. Many leaders in Afghanistan have had a checkered history of allegiance and these were no exception. Both Koori Mali and Allah Berdy had formerly been mujahideen commanders — the one Jamiat and the other Hezb-i-Islami (Hekmatyar). Similarly, the Saza militia commander of Rustak in alliance with Koori Mali, a Tajik named Samad but nicknamed "Samadov" by the muj, had defected from Jamiat a year earlier.

Koori Mali's relations with Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (DRA) leader Najib were rumored to have been anything but cordial and it was understood that the bulk of his support came from the hegemonic Soviets rather than the Pashtun premier. Given this fact, and that the founding leader of Saza, Tahir Badakhshi, was assassinated under the orders of a former (Pashtun) PDPA boss, Amin, it was more than a little surprising that Koori Mali chose to fight on with the government side after the Soviets had pulled out rather than turn with the mujahideen, now massing for the attack.

But stick with the DRA he did. In fact, Koori Mali was now receiving reinforcements via Samad in Rustak — 100 Saza militiamen arrived by chopper along with another 60 DRA army regulars from Kunduz.

So there it was. In order to take out the Bagh, Massoud first had to defeat Koori Mali and his cohorts. Massoud's plan as outlined that night called for an 1,100-man joint Jamiat-Harakat-Hezb assault on two fronts backed up by a bombardment from 107mm BM-1 rocket launchers, 82mm mortars and 82mm recoilless rifles.

It looked like the shit was about to hit the fan in a big way. But it very nearly didn't work out this way. In fact, just four days previously Massoud was meeting in person with Koori Mali in Taloqan trying to persuade him to come over. It went like this. . .

I was staying with Jamiat Commander Akram Khan in the small but comfortable



Muj with AK-74 and BG-15 grenade launcher.

house just across the road from the now sacked government malaria eradication office, about a 10-minute stroll from the main city bazaar. Breakfast, my favorite meal of the day, wasn't up to the usual high calorie standards I'd come to expect — merely sweetened milk tea and fresh bread. Where were the cakes?

Akram Khan assured me there would be no operation today, but sometime late "Amir Sahib" — Massoud — would be arriving. That was heartening news so I turned my attention to my shortwave radio where a Soviet pop group with the unlikely name "Metal Corrosion" jammed out some outrageous noise that seemed heavy on bass until I realized that I was hearing the sound of guns firing here in the city. Bagh-i-Zaqira was under attack.

Hasanullah, Akram Khan's major-domo, shrugged it off as unimportant, a side-show shootout by a Hezb group apparently. I visited the bazaar to see for myself, but it was business as usual, the shooting ignored, so I took advantage of a street photographer to have my picture taken. Among the miniatures displayed on the side of the big box camera were several of DRA soldiers, one with his AK in hand.

Akram Khan's place was quiet until 1815 hours when two jeeps pulled up outside, the occupants quickly disappearing inside. Massoud and Koori Mali. One of Akram Khan's muj couldn't contain his excitement: "Did you see Koori Mali?" Akram Khan chose to play it coy: "Nothing is happening." Sure, sure. Also present were commanders Gadoh and Laulavi Wudut, the latter a *hausa* or zone commander of Tarkhar Province.

While the big boys held talks behind closed doors the rest of us had dinner — rice, meat, yogurt, melons, apples, tea and sweets. Sometime into the after dinner discussion where I fielded the usual questions (What is your job? How much do brides cost in your country? How often do you say your prayers?) my attention was directed to the three lads sitting on my left, until then unnoticed except for their overpowering need of a bath.

Dressed in turbans, combat jackets and boots, with regular Afghan baggy shirt and pantaloons they looked much like their hosts except for one minor, but significant, detail — they were clean-shaven. "Where are you from?" I asked casually. "Kozok." Aha, these were not mujahideen but militiamen — Koori Mali's bodyguards in fact.

Eyeing me with just a touch of wariness they admitted to having been Jamiat for five



Muj and captured AGS-17 30mm autogrenade launcher in Panjshir Valley.

years previously, and yes, perhaps they would be rejoining Jamiat again soon. But are you still receiving supplies from the government? "Yes, they come regularly. Today two helicopters arrived from Kunduz." Confused? Hell, I felt like Alice in Wonderland!

Around 2225 hours there was a movement in the hallway and my bodyguard mates grabbed their AK-74s (one bearing the underslung BG-15 40mm grenade launcher) and hurried outside. The guests were leaving. I thought I'd missed him until I noticed a guy in front of a Soviet truck. His facial expression fascinated me. He had a haunted, if not hunted, look; the prey, not the predator. I was looking at Koori Mali.

His face was pitted with pockmarks and he was lightly bearded, wearing the standard Kabul woollen pullover under his green combat jacket. He carried no visible weapon, looked just like your average bazaar merchant. How wrong could you be?

One of my muj friends tugged at my sleeve to ensure I'd recognized Koori Mali. This muj had gone to school with him years ago, and now was riding shotgun in his former buddy's jeep to allow them to pass safely through the muj night patrols. Kazok was only a 15 minute drive away.

I sometimes drove in Taloqan at night with Akram Khan in his Russian sedan and found the roads to be closely guarded by the muj, who would leap out of the shadows with an unnerving and challenging shout: "Dresh" — stop! You were dead meat if you didn't.

Anyway, earlier that evening Massoud had excused himself from his meeting with Koori Mali to review some 500 mujahideen parading at the school grounds of the former Lycee. His attack groups were forming. Furthermore, before I'd turned in for the night I had counted 131 107mm BM-1 rock-

ets stacked in the garden of the malaria office. They had been off-loaded from trucks in the dark and covered with sacking.

That Massoud was gearing up for an attack was obvious. The target we took for granted to be Bagh-i-Zaqira. It turned out we were very wrong, but not even Massoud could know this at the time.

Next morning was spent in the bazaar rummaging around a shuttered shop that had been a government propaganda bookshop. Printed in Moscow, in Farsi, the books were the usual stuff with heavy emphasis on political philosophy of the traditional theorists. Also some poetry and fiction.

My friend Haroon of Jamiat's cultural committee for the north indicated a cover illustration of a woman kissing a man and explained that this was "unacceptable" by the moral standards of Afghans. A typical example he stated, of Soviet insensitivity to the cultural fabric of the very people they were supposed to be converting.

Illiteracy notwithstanding, you can only wonder at such gauche attempts to win the population over when Afghan antipathy to the perceived Soviet unbeliever is so deeply ingrained. One dry goods merchant in the bazaar had his shutters covered with colorful posters from the Soviet Union. I asked him if he knew which country they represented. "Pakistan," he guessed. When I enlightened him he tore all the posters off the shutters muttering malevolently about "kaffirs" (unbelievers).

Back at Akram Khan's place I chanced upon Massoud who'd just had a hot bath and his hair trimmed. I seized the opportunity of finding him relaxed and unencumbered by aides, petitioners and commanders to get a quiet briefing on the current situation. We

both excused ourselves for our broken French, of which Massoud's fluency outstripped mine.

Massoud seemed confident that the target would be Bagh-i-Zaqira, detailing enemy defenses and mujahideen positions. I was to be placed with a combined Jamiat-Khalis group whose objective was securing the main entrance to the garden. Massoud wouldn't give an exact date for the attack, but it was to be very soon. In any case, a "comrade" would call to collect me at the appropriate time.

The rest of the day I passed reading *The Lotus and the Wind* by John Masters, a fine book with the action set in Central Asia as Imperial Russia and the British Empire played the Great Game for control of Afghanistan.

There was also an intriguing game unfolding before me right then. At 2145 Massoud turned up and closeted himself in one of the rooms until midnight, when he left, personally driving his jeep. He left behind an air of general depression and gloom.

After breakfast the following day I learned there had been a fuck-up. Commander Gadoh confirmed that the "one-eyed man" was the problem — Koori Mali was supposed to have shown up last night but he hadn't. Not only that but Gadoh had been mortared from a Saza firebase that morning while on a recce.

Had Koori Mali double-crossed the muj? As soon as Massoud arrived I asked him, attempting diplomacy, if he had a 'small problem?' His reply was unusually vehement: "No, there is a BIG problem!"

After lunch I sought out Dr. Abdullah for an explanation, which just added to my general confusion. The problem was not Koori Mali he said, but Wujkhun! Instead of defecting as anticipated, Wujkhun was hanging in with the DRA.

This much was confirmed — dramatically — that night, when 12 of Wujkhun's men defected to Jamiat after a shootout in which Wujkhun himself was seriously wounded. It seems Wujkhun had ordered his men to open fire on the would-be defectors but the crew of a BMP-1 had instead zapped Wujkhun (and his brother), both of whom had to be medevaced to one of Koori Mali's field clinics.

The following morning Wujkhun's remaining loyal troops shelled the city and most of the bazaar shops were shuttered. I was able to purchase some shampoo, though the price had doubled because "no more supplies were coming from Kabul." That, I realised, was because Jamiat had blockaded the Salang Highway in retaliation against Soviet arms convoys which were arriving in the capital in concert with the much publicized Soviet military pullout.

At lunch I came face to face with Allah Berdy. At that time he was just one of several faces in the room. With him was Arbab Turan. Both were introduced by a Jamiat commander named Qayum Boy who had acted as an intermediary between Massoud and Wujkhun. Qayum Boy said Arbab Turan had been Khad, though now Jamiat

Public garden of Bagh-i-Zaqira and surrounding neighborhood were site of furious fighting on western outskirts of city of Taloqan.

and an intermediary between Massoud and Koori Mali/Allah Berdy. Hasanullah, a former Khad man himself (though a self-professed double-agent for Massoud), described Arbab Turan as Safzah and an "opportunist." Qayum Boy meanwhile, had a brother in the muj party NIFA...

My head was swimming with all this apparent perfidy. Who was working for whom? Qayum Boy introduced Allah Berdy as former Hezb turned Khad-militia now about to turn Jamiat. What did I think of that? In my notebook that day I observed: "Not impressed. Hard-hearted self-serving type true only to his own crooked ways. I'd shoot the bastard." How right I was.

At 1615 hours Massoud, Dr. Abdullah and some Central Units' commanders arrived. The situation was this. At 0900 this morning a messenger from Koori Mali had arrived to deliver this note: "Following the wishes of my men, we will not come over to your side." The messenger thought otherwise — he defected.

The four-party mujahideen coalition of Taloqan had given Koori Mali until 1500 hours to reconsider. He didn't change his mind. Massoud drove away. So did Allah Berdy and Arbab Turan. It was war.

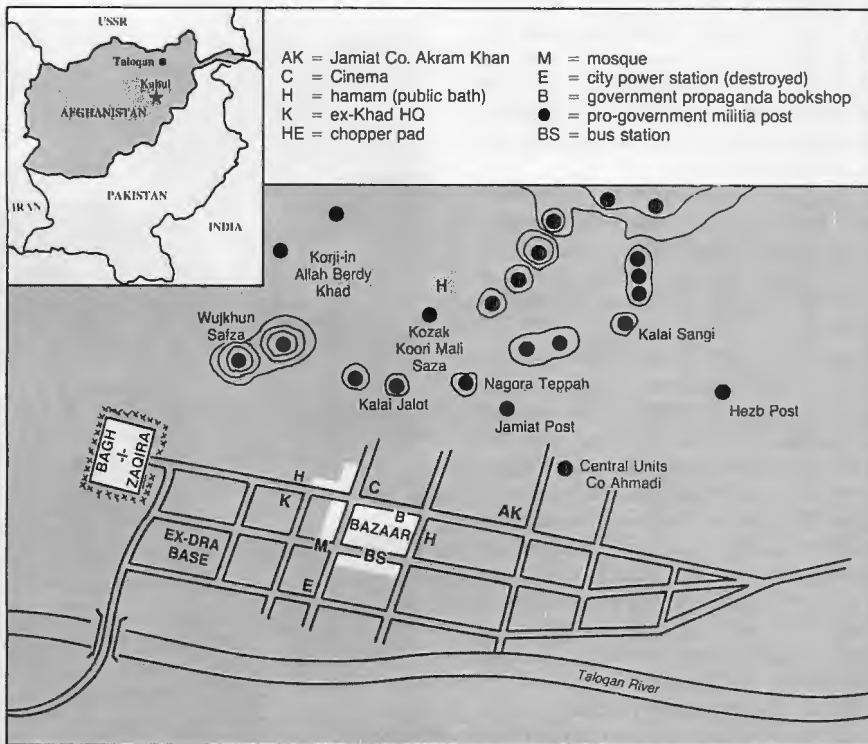
So there I was next night with Massoud summing up his plans for the 1,100-man assault against Koori Mali's HQ, Kazok village. But when would we move? Lunch came and went next day before I learned from Massoud's communications team that the attack had been delayed because Koori Mali was still ambivalent about his allegiance!

Massoud extended his grace period till the evening and Kabul in turn was in continual radio exchange promising all manner of support if he would just hold on — and, it was alleged, extraction to safety if his positions fell.

Kabul may have been playing Koori Mali's Saza militia as a sacrificial pawn in order to test Massoud's strength, or indeed to defeat or cripple him in battle and thereby break the Massoud myth of invincibility. Either way they were taking no chances, for at 1400 and 1600 hours jets screamed over Ganji Ali Beg village where we were billeted by locals and accurately unloaded some mean ordnance.

The bombs left small craters but a broad blast zone; one bomb cleared the garden where I took my constitutional craps of all shrubbery with a technological efficiency I might have admired were it not for the fact that the next bomb made a direct hit on a civilian's home just 50 meters from where I was staying. We lost all the glass in our windows but they lost the entire house, and I saw — amidst the wailing of the women — one body dug out of the rubble with still more missing.

The morning of my second breakfast in



Colonel Haqim fires his AK while another muj stands by with radio and spare RPG round during attack against Nagora Teppah.

Ganji Ali Beg was spent with Commander Gadoh, who questioned me on the theory of evolution. The Russians believe man came from monkeys, he said, how could that be possible? Was he testing me or teasing me; it seemed to his way of checking if I was a kinsman or a kaffir.

But my mind was elsewhere, and so, unfortunately, was Massoud. My frustration mounted as this shaped up to be a phony war. I learned that reinforcements were being called up, and not unexpectedly, that Allah Berdy was still on the side of the DRA. So it seemed, was Koori Mali. We got bombed again.

On my third day at Ganji Ali Beg I learned that the strategy for Koori Mali had changed. He was to be softened up with "several days" of bombardment before the frontal assaults were mounted. Later I would be taken to the artillery units, so I settled in to wait with Tom

Waits on my Walkman. "Sixteen shells from a .30-06," he croaked. More than I'd heard fired here yet.

At 1600 hours two Central Units' commanders, Sana'ullah and Sayed Yaya, collected me and we drove to a mosque 15 minutes away where the heavy artillery group under Sana'ullah was based. Tomorrow the bombardment would start and continue for three days, and then, *insha'alah* (God willing), the attack would start.

Dinner wasn't up to city standards, but not bad considering we were "in the field" — soup, meat, potatoes, bread and tea. Also I was given a spot in a side room off the mosque with thick quilts to sleep under. Conversation that night was mercifully light on theology; instead Parlawan Qadir, who had adopted me as his personal charge, entertained me with stories of his sports visit to Moscow before the war.

I rose leisurely at 0645 and ambled to a hilltop to view a serene sunrise, the soft orange light reflecting on the gathering snows of the distant Hindu Kush. Breakfast

was back to basics: plain bread and tea. Then Qadir escorted me on a tour of the fire bases. The tranquility of the day was first broken by a 12.7mm DShK heavy machine gun which was dug in behind the mud wall of a fallow wheat field.

The firing seemed desultory, no dramatic bursts on full auto but single shots ranging in on a distant hilltop where the Saza militia had observation posts. A great to-do was made about staying low but we received no incoming.

The 107mm BM-1 rocket launcher was a different story altogether — sleek and simple but ruthlessly efficient in properly trained hands, which this crew was. First they watered down the grass which received the terrific back-blast and then made the appropriate sighting adjustments after the fused projectile had been cleaned and loaded. After the radio crackled its clearance the launcher cable was plugged into the charge-box and the button depressed. Crash! Scarlet flame and distant death and destruction.

The second round wasn't lethal — it was a dud. On firing the base plate hurtled backwards but the rocket refused to ignite, leaving six jet ports exposed but impotent. The 82mm Egyptian-made mortars didn't open up until the afternoon, when only five rounds were fired. Even the BM-1 was used only sporadically with nine rounds fired during the day and a further two in the night.

The view from Commander Sana'ullah's observation post next morning was hazy but the hilltop dominated the valley where Kazok was dimly visible. The trenches and bunkers of the Saza militia on the adjacent hills were quite clear through the binoculars and I gaped in wonder as militiamen trotted all over the hill slopes with no apparent concern for their safety. We had bunkers too, and they were necessary; Sana'ullah showed me mortar craters just meters away from our dugout.

Two BM-1s were in operation together with the 82mm mortars, stepping up the pace of the bombardment. We also began to take some incoming — 120mm mortar rounds — but without loss. Taloqan bazaar wasn't so lucky. It got hit with sam-sams the same day and there were eight civilians killed and 20 wounded.

By the third day the BM-1s and mortars were each cranking out 60 rounds, around the clock. So was the 76mm field gun under Sayed Yaya. One of three captured from government forces, it discharged with a fantastic retort, the whole gun rocking on its carriage as the empty brass shell casings were ejected.

The shelling was beginning to have some effect judging from the number of jet strikes that day. No muj positions were hit but I saw civilian wounded carried on makeshift stretchers from one hit village. "Where were you?" the muj asked when I returned to the BM-1 positions. They were excited because two incoming 120mm mortar rounds had landed about 50 meters distant.

Likewise the DShK crew had a close



shave. Tapping a piece of shrapnel against his chest one 38-year-old muj (who looked closer to 60) exclaimed: "Maybe I will become *shaheed* (martyred)." It was almost a lament that he had survived the last barrage, a fatalistic attitude shared by many mujahideen I met.

These muj were grunts and they looked it. Many admitted to being tired of the war and if the end of fighting for them meant dying then they were ready for it. But although Islam teaches that to die a martyr in the *jihad*, or holy struggle, means the certain reward of paradise in the afterlife, the muj I met were in no way averse to some more immediate and material rewards in the here and now.

Who could blame them? The war has been long and hard. They had nothing to live for in the way of home and land — the war had taken care of those. Some muj who were married hadn't seen much less slept with their wives in months, years even. One juvenile muj, his beard yet to ripen, complained he had been 10 days without any sex, making appropriate finger gestures in case I'd missed the point. "That's right," allowed his mates, "he's got two wives — donkeys!" If nothing else, they still had a sense of humor.

Day four with arty — I was ready for a change. It was a bitter overcast day with no hint of the sun and every sign of winter. The usual bombardment continued. At lunch (rice, meat and potato curry), among the guests was Dr. Sarwar, a senior Hezb commander with an uncharacteristically intimate relationship with Jamiat. Although al-



TOP: Dragunov SVD sniper rifle in action.

ABOVE: 82mm recoilless about to fire on Saza militia post.

ways denied by the upper echelon of commanders, it was no secret that the Jamiat-i-Islami and Hezb-i-Islami (Hekmatyar) groups were fierce rivals even to the point of armed conflict.

After lunch I joined a forward mortar commander who assured me his position was hot. Yesterday, he claimed, a T-54 tank shell had nearly wiped them out. Would I be able to handle it? It was more a challenge than an invitation but I was happy to take the bait.

We tramped through hard-packed fields that had already yielded up their rice crop



that I was comfortable. His group were cool; no wise-arse punks, no hassles and no grillings over prayers. He didn't know when the offensive was coming down but they were mounting hit-and-run attacks daily which I was welcome to join.

I slept deeply that night. Three months into this trip into Afghanistan and I reckoned I was getting acclimatized to the vagaries of food and accommodation. Their program wasn't due to start until the afternoon so I took advantage of the morning to visit Akram Khan's for a change of kit and on to the bazaar for some kebabs and eggs.

The bazaar was busy as usual as I sat at my favorite shop drinking a can of Dutch soda imported via the Soviet Union. The sheer variety of goods available never ceased to amaze me. First there were local imports such as "Vaseline Pomade" from Kandahar (the ingredients and bottles came from Pakistan) and candies from Kunduz — both cities under DRA control.

Then there was cooking oil from Turkey, Singapore and the USSR. The "Fritter Fat" made in Samarkand came like all Soviet goods (tomato paste, jam, sugar) via Mazar-i-Sharif. Japanese batteries, German soap, Irish "Blood Tonic," Saudi perfumes and American cigarettes came via Kabul. And would you credit it, there was even a Hong Kong-made plastic submachine gun — "sparking with a rat-a-tat sound."

Little did I realize, but I was about to get my fill of just that. Abdul Haqim was leading our squad for the afternoon's strike. He'd chosen a 7.62mm Dragunov rifle for a little sniping work. My confidence in his combat skills was shaken when he set about sighting in the Dragunov against the wall of a house. First shot: "click" — no round up the spout! But I needn't have worried about this dude.

Haqim was short but tough, and like many Central Units men, a native of the Panjshir Valley. He had known Andy Skrzypkowiak, a former British SAS-man turned cameraman who was murdered in Nuristan (see "Assignment Afghanistan," SOF, April '88). They had been together in the Salang and Haqim had been impressed by Andy's bravery. Now it was my turn to show my mettle.

We tramped through rice fields to the camp of a local Jamiat commander and old-timer, Parlawan Rusi, whose turban seemed to be supported by his magnificent ears. His men occupied a frontline foothold in a bombed-out house on an exposed ridgeline from where our target, the Saza security post of Nagora Teppah, challenged our presence.

Dodging a tangle of burnt grape vines we crept through the rubble until we could view the post in the clear, about 300 meters away. A low wall provided cover. All quiet. Then Haqim and one of our squad beckoned me forward. There was a shallow trench that snaked forward 50 meters into the open. No cover.

We scanned the Beau Geste-style fortress, Haqim squinting into his field glasses. No movement. We waited silently. I took a

turn with the glasses. Nothing. Wait . . . was it a shadow? Shit no! A man walking the parapet. Then quickly gone.

I waited for confirmation . . . and here it came. Fuck me, not one but three bodies, head and shoulders clear. I nudged Haqim. He nodded, took the glasses. They were going for a hit.

With Haqim spotting, his mate adjusted the sights and lined up for a shot. He was a left-hander. Incredibly he cranked off 10 rounds, a full magazine, and missed. Incredibly, the targets didn't disappear.

Haqim took over. He reloaded and removed the scope from the Dragunov, and let rip once, twice . . . no hit. Second magazine, third round — crack! The right-hand figure on the parapet seemed to jerk sideways. He disappeared. Zapped!

CRASH! Almost simultaneously the air was rent by a rocket burst just behind, showering us with dirt, debris, smoke and shock wave. "Go-go!" shouted Haqim, urging me back up the trench. PK and AK fire stitched the air, cracking and popping and snarling in frenzied chorus.

I crouch-charged back up the trench. Shit! Why couldn't these buggers dig this deeper! Cameras dangling, smashing, who cares. Chest heaving like a bastard, heart damn near in mouth . . . right turn, keep going. Open space — fuck no, don't stop. RUN dammit!

Crouched behind the low wall feeling exposed and as helpless as a newborn baby. Incredible racket. Incoming smacking into mud. I can feel the anger of the enemy — and, ah shit, hear the low growl of a tank! Where? How close? It was a sound I'd previously associated with an earth-moving bulldozer; this was a hungry steel beast swollen with the venom of lethal pay-back.

I buried my head deeper into the dust. The details of a lump of dirt, a root of grass, shone clearly. I was very much here and now, yet strangely removed. A small piece of shrapnel lay close by — a fragment of that incoming RPG-7. I put it in my pocket. The incoming poured on. High above, a lone bird soared on a thermal.

Was I afraid? Well, I wasn't waving any arms in defiance. I was very humble. I was shit scared.

After what seemed like a *half hour* — probably five minutes — the firing slackened off. Haqim and his offside reappeared. The buggers had been safely sheltered in a small foxhole.

I felt drained but elated as we trooped back to camp, oblivious to stray shots and random incoming. This near insolent disdain for background dangers was no act of false bravado — we had just returned from the bowels of hell, what could possibly touch us now?

Day two with the attack group. At 0520 as I went down to the river for my morning crap the dawn sun was just a hint of yellow filtering through the grey of winter's shroud. By 0900 it was a clear, fine day and jets were prowling overhead. The *muj* guessed they were Tu-16s from Dushanbe

skirting ultimately the gung-ho mortar crew, who simply passed me on to the next forward group. To my surprise I found myself across the river from the main road that led directly to Akram Khan's place. From here it was only 500 meters to the closest Saza outposts.

My new host was one of the top five Central Units attack commanders, whom I'd met several weeks earlier at the *Maktab*, or military training school where Massoud was currently raising his Islamic Army of Afghanistan, a conventional force with an initial projected strength of four battalions of 2,400 men each.

Commander Ahmadi, who spoke moderately good English which complemented my broken Farsi, made every effort to see



Muj loads 82mm recoilless rifle for shoulder-shoot against Saza militia post at Kalai Sangi.



in Soviet Tajikistan, because they flew "very high, very slow."

By 1015 we were heading to the front with an 82mm recoilless rifle. Our target was a large blockhouse structure at Kalai Jalot. A second team was going to hammer Kalai Sangi. Commander Ahmadi was directing operations; I joined Abdul Haqim at Parlawan Rusi's post where we'd been yesterday. A barefoot lad guided me to where the recoilless was being set up, **proudly pointing** out his family's 4/5ths hectare of land in one breath and just as proudly in his second breath announcing that his brother was *shaheed*.

The recoilless rifle was being locked onto its tripod at a treeline I had to reach by dashing across an open field exposed to Saza marksmen. Kalai Jalot was about 500 meters away and Haqim fiddled about sighting in. He'd forgotten his binoculars and had to borrow my miniature mono. A couple of local muj we'd borrowed for security had forgotten their AKs so they were sent back to fetch them.

Meanwhile I was prone in the grass to the side-rear of the recoilless, safe from its vicious backblast but highly vulnerable to incoming. It was the only place from where I could get a decent photograph of Sultan Mohammad the gunner, who was now dousing the grass down with water he'd

Mujahideen fire 76mm field gun against Saza militia posts of Koori Mali.

scooped out of a creek with his Russian tank helmet.

If I thought I had problems then Sultan was definitely in deep shit, as he was obliged to squat next to his gun until the barrage was over. I admired his courage. His trembling hands betrayed outward calm but he controlled his emotion with willpower, and faith. He was loaded, sighted and cleared to fire.

"*Bismillah-Rahman-Rahim*" (In the Name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful), he whispered to himself. Then louder: "*Allah-o-Akbar*" (God is Great!) Crash! Sultan has disappeared in a cloud of dust but I know he is reloading for the second shot. Crash! The cottonwool earplugs I made are not up to the job. I roll over to the cover of the treeline.

Crash! Shit, incoming mortar! False alarm — recoilless shockwave only. Crack-crack-crack! Incoming small arms. Crash! Final round and Sultan is dismantling the recoilless to a crescendo of AK and PK...Slap! Slap!...and (ah no) DShK?...ZKU?...fire!

The boys are up and sprinting in twos and threes across the open field until it's just

me and one of the locals left. Faizalahmad is not much more than a boy but he has plenty of common sense. Wait, he cautions. Crash! Crash! Two RPG rounds explode against the mud wall I had huddled behind yesterday. We sit tight. I notice his jugular thumping. Every time I prepare to make a break all hell lets loose. Trapped! A field mouse dashes out of its hole. I must go too. Faizalahmad shrugs. He's staying put.

I break for it. . . legs like lead. . . no incoming? . . . whiplash-crash! Hell's beckoning call erupts to my right. Black smoke — RPG! — now hitting the deck 20 meters short of cover. I'm in the shit — literally cowshit — who cares! Same instant — I'm wide-eyed in fear as an iridescent chunk of flak hits the ground two meters behind me spinning like a top and spewing scarlet flame and white smoke.

Fucking hell! What's that? Fuck the bullets; I'm up and moving and it seems like slow motion but I'm safely behind the wall. Crash! Crash! Crash! Three sam-sams slam home. Running again, an open doorway visible across a clearing. Encouraging hands signal me in. Crash! Crash! Sure, sure. I bite the dirt again.

Survey the scene. Recoilless rifle abandoned in front of me. Ha! This is a heavy number, Border, but you can't sit out here forever. Legs like jelly but pumped up with adrenaline, I hoof it through the door. Big grins all round. Safe!

That night we ate heartily: rice, meat, potatoes and melon. "You eat like an Afghan now," approved Commander Ahmadi. That day there had been three recoilless rifle attacks (total nine rounds fired), 20 rounds of 82mm mortar fired, and 24 rounds each from two BM-1 launchers around the clock.

"The morale of the enemy is very low," asserted Ahmadi. At 2100 hours several incoming 120mm mortar bombs shook the foundations of our house. I reserved my judgment.

With no morning program I split for the bazaar the next day at 0900 hours. At 0930 a T-54 tank shell made a direct hit on the main dirt track to the river. No one was hurt. I collected my washing from the laundry and headed for the *hamam* or public bath opposite the former Khad HQ where I removed several layers of grime, sluicing myself under deliciously hot water.

In the afternoon Ahmadi led our squad for a recoilless attack against Kalai Sangi, stopping first at an isolated Hezb outpost to gather intel. Sultan shoulder-fired four rounds at the fortress some 800 meters off. Immediately after, the muj broke away, dashing through the trees, wild laughter breaking their tension.

Naturally I got left behind and pinned down under small arms fire. Never again, I vowed. It seemed to me that the trick was to

get clear before the enemy had gathered their wits and got a bearing on the attackers.

The evening meal was the usual banquet of meat. Mirza Mohammad, a Marlon Brando lookalike who had had a traumatic arm wound repaired in Riverside, California, ripped a mutton-bone out of a socket graphically illustrating his description of another wounded muj he had seen. During the mandatory after dinner discussion of the day's events someone came out with: "War is good." I amended this by contributing: "War is not good, but sometimes necessary." Haqim shot back with: "Everywhere there are Russians war is necessary."

Abdul Haqim was a hunter-killer, pure and natural, and the next day he was back in his element. At 0900 Ahmadi set out with one squad, while I went with Haqim and Sultan. We were going for Nagora Teppah again but this time we advanced beyond Parlewan Rusi's post and entered a small village following a narrow lane which led to an open field where Nagora Teppah startled me like a slap in the face.

The monolithic building stood perhaps 80 meters from us as we conferred in whispers. Sultan was creeping about like a thief in the night, psyching himself up for what amounted to a frontal assault. The backblast of his launcher was posing a problem when, scouting for a viable vantage point, I spotted Haqim and a couple of others creeping into a field with just their AKs and an RPG-7.

The attack proceeded. Sultan's recoilless thundered in the background as Haqim fired the first rocket propelled grenade. While his mates reloaded he blasted away with his AK-47. Then I saw an amazing thing — an incoming RPG round struck a sapling, cut it neatly in two without detonating, and surged on to erupt into black smoke and shrapnel several meters behind me.

With our ammo expended (RPG-7: four, recoilless: two) we retreated back down the narrow lane under a berserk hail of bullets and took temporary cover in an old woman's courtyard. She began berating us with such a fury we decided to risk the incoming and make a dash for it. I knew the drill — first out, first away. How wrong could you be?

We were driven back inside by exploding RPG rounds and had to suffer the hag's wrath once more. Out of the frying pan into the fire. In fact, that's where we were headed next. No sooner had we safely exfiltrated that village when we got diverted to another village where incoming mortar rounds had set a household's winter forage alight. We formed a bucket brigade to help extinguish the blaze.

There was more to come yet. The tea was barely settled in our stomachs when a call came to rush to the relief of a mujahideen post. What irony. Twenty Saza militiamen from Kalai Sangi were counterattacking the Hezb post we had visited yesterday prior to our attack on Kalai Sangi. Hezb had lost one KIA and one wounded. We left at 1125 hours to group up with Hezb mujahideen of Dr. Sarwar and Eshoni Merza (the brother of



Muj celebrates victory over DRA in ex-DRA garrison.

Said Jamal, Hezb commander of Taloqan).

Various units were scouting the countryside for Saza and the rest of us were resting up in the post.

1306 hours — I check the veranda for photo opportunities and return inside when there are none. Crash! Four muj stagger through the open door dripping blood. One collapses on the floor.

Militia mortar round. We hug the walls. A 14 year old in gumboots with a thigh wound is whimpering and curtly ordered to shut up. Crash! Second round on the other side of the house and dirt and debris spray in through the open window on the shockwave.

The wounded were hauled off for treatment elsewhere. Not more than 30 minutes later the muj had forgotten the incident and were carelessly lounging around on the veranda outside again. Downstairs carrot-garnished rice was dished out for the hungry as muj came and went in confusion.

1515 hours: a squad of Sana'ullah's men appeared looking tense like the others. Radios squeaked, orders were shouted, tempers frayed, chaos reigned. Crash! Crash! Mortars! Crash! Crash! Crash! Samsams! Incoming was everywhere and Saza could have been anywhere. For an outfit with alleged low morale Saza were putting

up a good show of resistance.

Resistance hell! Now they were counterattacking! Again! A recoilless crew charged out dripping spare rounds followed by a 7.62mm PK GPMG gunner and assistant lugging ammo canisters. I sat tight and left them to thrash it out.

1545 hours: The muj might have been under mounting pressure but so was I. I completed one of the most difficult feats in the field — taking a crap under fire. 1630: Haqim is on the radio asking where I am. Sit tight, he orders. No sweat.

By 1700 the attack was beaten back and now the muj were dispersed all over with teams blasting available targets. BM-1 arty was still active as a radioman and I, the last of Ahmadi's men at the Hezb post, slipped away under cover of a glorious sunset. As the twilight turned to dusk, tracer fire ricocheted off the maidan we marched across, punctuating our departure.

I gestured a defiant finger in return — a fitting mock salute — and turned my back on Koori Mali. I wasn't returning. Winter snows had now blocked the Hindu Kush passes that lead to Pakistan — I would have to trek the long way out, south of Kabul.

POST SCRIPT: One month after my departure from Taloqan, on Christmas Day 1988, as I was being arrested on the Afghan-Pakistan border, Bagh-i-Zaqira fell to Mas-soud's forces following the defeat of Koori Mali. ☒



"Old Bill," a mountain man trader, makes canvas tepees, pyramids, and wall tents for sale at rendezvous. A former bank manager in charge of eight branch establishments, he now goes to 30 rendezvous a year and sometimes "makes as much as he did banking." He's wearing a traditional mountain man calico shirt with red fox fur hat.



"Lone Elk," a three-time champion of the Colorado State Muzzle Loading Association shoot, fires his custom-made flintlock rifle.

BUCKSKINS AND LEAD BALLS

Modern Mountain Men
Survive 20th Century

by Morgan Tanner
Photos by David Bjorkman

IN the rougher, simpler days of the early 1800s the mountain man traveled the uncharted territory of the West, trapping beaver and selling their pelts. He owed his loyalty to no man, he lived by his own law, and he stayed alive in the harsh environs of the virgin Rockies by his skill and his wits. He killed what he ate, and he ate what he killed.

MOUNTAIN MAN MORGAN

A veteran correspondent for National News Service, Morgan Tanner regularly covers the war zones of Central America for SOF, and more recently did two articles on the gang/crack connection threatening our cities (see "Crack in America" and "Crack in the Heartland," June and July '89), before returning to Guatemala (see "Death in High Places," September '89). In this article Tanner travels backward in time to explore a curious revival of the world of the ultimate—and perhaps original—survivalist, the American mountain man.



“No shades,” says a dog soldier posted at the road leading to the National Western Rendezvous.

A hand-lettered sign tacked to a board says “Members-Only, Pre-1840 Dress Required,” and the dog soldier at the entrance keeps watch for anything that doesn’t belong in the era of the historical mountain man. No zippers, no Levis, no visible pockets in trousers, no cowboy boots or hats, no smokes that aren’t hand-rolled, and no space-age plastic. Our sunglasses come off. “Camp’s that way,” he says, pointing up a dusty scar of a road flanked by pines. “’Bout a mile.”

It is at rendezvous like the National Western that modern buckskinners live the life of their hero: the mountain man.

“He was the ultimate survivalist,” says trader and leathersmith Mike Gull.

But once a year, he enjoyed civilization

for a few days at rendezvous. It was there that he traded his “hairy little bank notes,” for supplies he couldn’t live without: lead and black powder for his muzzle loader, knives for skinning beaver and deer, salt, blankets, trade beads for the Indians he met up with. He saw old friends and enemies, and he made up for a lack of company with whiskey, women, and shooting matches before he returned to the wilderness.

At the National Western, held annually in the Rocky Mountains, rendezvousers wear leather buckskins and sleep in tepees. They cook on open fires and wash in mountain

streams. They visit with friends from prior rendezvous and shoot black powder weapons. And while they leave their vehicles at the gate, 95 percent of them carry a muzzle loader into camp.

“A true rendezvouser, he’ll see a straight tree and think, ‘Tepee pole,’ ” says Steell Fuller of Retsof, New York. “He’ll see road kill and think, ‘Is it too messed up? Can I save the skin?’ ”

“Old” Bill Henderson, a tepee-maker from Circleville, Utah, voices a sentiment held by many buckskinners. “Twenty years from now,” he says, “we all may be using the skills we learn here.”

Oak Smith, one of two booshways, or leaders, of the 1989 National Western, takes us toward his tepee, one of several snuggled up into a stand of aspen. The Wyman Elk Ranch in Colorado’s northern Rockies, site of this year’s event, is nearly as primitive as when mountain men trapped beaver in its lakes in the 1830s. Elk graze its meadows, and bear grub in its stands of pine and fir. Even in summer, snow crowns the ridges of its northern slopes.

Now, with rendezvous, its valleys hold more than 500 tepees, as tall and splendid as white trees. Men in beaded-and-fringed leathers walk the foot-trails of camp carrying long rifles. The boom of black powder shooting thunders through the air. Six-hole hooters — three for bucks, three for squaws — stand in strategic places throughout the camp.



An example of the earlier flintlock rifle and the later-developed percussion cap rifle. Both were loaded from a powder horn, at the muzzle. The flintlock also had to be primed with powder at the breech.





“For 10 days, we’re a city,” says George Jackson, from near Roosevelt, Utah, co-booshway of the event. “Wood, water and waste, that’s what we live by.”

At his tepee, Oak stoops to agitate a mass of clothes stewing in a bucket of gray water. “My laundry,” he explains.

A knife maker who lives on the Navajo Nation, Oak wears round, old-fashioned eyeglasses, and his hair long. A red breechcloth threads between his legs and loops front and back over his belt, revealing a good bit of cheek.

“You get over the slight indecency of having your bum show, and then it gets sunburned and chapped,” he says of the breechcloth.

He has even worn it to town, he says, without incident. “When you see a guy armed to the teeth and meaner than a skunk, would you go up and say, ‘Your mother

Booshways for the NMLRA 1989 National Western Rendezvous were Oak Smith (left) and George Jackson (center). Here they take time out to admire a rifle while sitting in George Jackson’s lodge, talking to Jochen “Flint” Lahmann, booshway of the large Indian Council Rendezvous near Cologne, West Germany.

dresses you funny?’ No, most people just let it lay.”

He motions us into his 18-foot lodge. We step around a firepit near the opening, crossing old-patterned carpets that cover the ground, and sit on a blanketed seat. Everything has been placed on the perimeter, making the interior surprisingly spacious. A rich brown buffalo hide covers a double bed roll, and an old steamer trunk holds a wardrobe of buckskins and calico shirts. Two

custom-made muzzle loaders hang from the lodge poles, as do a candle chandelier and several “lodge boxes,” or leather storage bags. Oak lifts the lid on a pine box and pulls some cold beers from its styrofoam-lined innards.

“What I need is a booshway’s boilermaker,” George says, flopping on the buffalo. “An ounce of beer in a water glass topped off with George Dickels.”

But he accepts a Coors and takes off his hat—a low-crowned, taupe-colored beaver hat he had specially made. The talk turns to how the men got interested in rendezvous.

“For me, it was wanting to recreate the feeling of independence and self-sufficiency,” says Oak. “Of being able to make your own things.”

He points to a buttery-yellow leather pouch hanging from a lodge pole.

“George not only made that bag,” he says, “he shot the deer, skinned it, tanned the hide, and then beaded it up. That’s the kind of self-sufficiency we’re talking about. You feel that leather there; it’s real nice and soft, just like felt.”

Each fall, George guides elk hunters at the Wyman Ranch, and he arranged for the National Western to be held there. He tans some 55 hides a year and wears strands of elk teeth around his neck.

“Of course, you can’t be totally independent because you’ve got to have powder, lead, gun flints and knives,” George adds. “But, once a friend and me lived out all year. We killed deer, took the sinews out of ’em, and sewed our own moccasins and all our clothes. We did it to prove to ourselves that it could still be done.

“But living on deer meat and coffee gets pretty old,” he adds. “Pretty old.”



A mountain man named “Possum” sits with his trusty rifle while the food, in this case coffee, Buffalo tongue and ribs, cooks over the open fire in authentic hand-wrought iron cooking utensils. Holding his trusty knife, Possum keeps an eye out for “rib rustlers.”



While the hardships of the wilderness probably wore thin on mountain men Jim Bridger and Jedediah Smith, it was the economy, not the climate, that killed their zeal for beaver. The period of rendezvous was brief, from 1825 to 1840. Then in 1840, European men demanded silk for their top hats, and the bottom dropped out of the fur trade. Left without a job, mountain men established trading posts, settled down on farms and ranches in the Rockies, or looked to gold mining for their fortunes. Some, like Kit Carson, became guides for the wagon trains heading west.

When the notion of rendezvous resurfaced in the early 1970s, the National Muzzle Loading Rifle Association (NMLRA) had already been holding black powder shoots in Friendship, Indiana, since 1940, and added rendezvous to its activities. It now sponsors eight regional rendezvous a year, including the NMLRA National Western. There are an estimated 1,500 rendezvous throughout the country, with some 250,000 participants.

"Modern rendezvous has grown to the point where it is a national rural pastime," says Dr. Patrick McCarthy, a Colorado professor researching the phenomenon of rendezvous. "It probably rivals the rodeo in popularity."

While some rendezvous are re-enactments of historical events, the National Western allows for a wide variety of individuality in clothing and equipment. Bob Lienemann, an American Mountain Man member, suggests that rendezvousers develop a persona as a guideline for putting together an outfit.

"Decide who you are, who you work for, who's supplying you, your region," he says. "Then, you know how to dress and your accessories."

Mike Brooks, of Fulton, Indiana, dresses

NATIONAL MUZZLE LOADING RIFLE ASSOCIATION

"The only existing organization primarily involved in rendezvous. Founded in 1933, and based on the right of individuals to carry arms, NMLRA is one of the largest groups in the country fighting gun control, but that means primitive guns, the guns of history, black powder. At 26,000 active members, we're one of the fastest growing interest groups in the country," says NMLRA director John Arrasmith.

Eight NMLRA-sanctioned rendezvous include the Northwester, Southeaster, Old Northwest, Eastern, Southwestern, Western, Midwestern and High Plains. NMLRA sponsors two national shoots each year with primitive weapons.

NMLRA, Dept. SOF
P.O. Box 67
Friendship, IN 47021
Tel. (812) 667-5131

SPEAKING FORKED TONGUE

Booshaway — elected leader of the rendezvous
Secundo — second in command after the booshaway
Boogie fire — party-time around a campfire
Camp dog — never lights a fire, but eats like hell
Dog Soldier — camp cop
Blanket trader — makes enough money to keep going
Do-dah — okay, or hu'-rah
Hooter — latrine
Buckskinner — modern term for the 1790-1840 fur traders and free trappers
Rond-e-voov — easier than rendezvous
Pleu — beaver pelt
Plunder — the goods mountain men make or buy
Counting coup — touching an enemy in battle, not killing him
Nabob — same same, cool guys
Fat cow — good times, shining times
Poor bull — lean times, hard doings
Pork eaters — outsiders or city folks
Lodge — tepee (it is *not* called a tent)
Wah — a general-purpose exclamation "Don't know which way his stick floats" — from trappers, meaning not knowing how a man's thinking
Flash in the pan — powder in the pan of a flintlock burning without igniting the powder in the breech

STATE MUZZLE LOADING ASSOCIATIONS

If your state has a muzzle loading rifle association, the NMLRA will give you a number for contact. Tel. (812) 667-5131.

LOCAL CLUBS

There are hundreds of local clubs for muzzle loading enthusiasts. Call your state association, or ask at gun stores or trading posts in your area.

AMERICAN MOUNTAIN MAN

"In 1968, AMM started as a survival organization until the founders changed the focus to historical and educational. There are 620 members, and membership is through invitation only by two active members. Our annual National Rendezvous is held in the Rockies and is members only. Nothing is allowed in that didn't exist pre-1840 in the Rocky Mountains," says the Chief Clerk.

AMM, Dept. SOF
708 Rachel Dr.
Goodlettsville, TN 37027

as a soldier in the French-Indian War of 1754-63, an outfit rarely seen at western rendezvous. His jacket is a canvas hunting frock, and he wears a slouch "rifleman's" hat, a Huron Indian bag, a 1754 French sword and bayonette scabbard, canvas French Fly knee britches and Sac/Fox Indian leggings, handmade buckle shoes, a haversack, and a greatcoat of linen. His flintlock rifle, which he made himself, is an early Engle trade gun from 1760, smooth bore, 28 gauge (.55 caliber). His camp is a canvas wedge (tent) of the time.

More common to rendezvous are southwestern fur trappers influenced by the Spaniards who owned the territory south of the Arkansas River. These mountain men wear wide-brimmed, sombrero-type hats, cotton shirts, vests, tight canvas trousers with a leather seat and high, black boots. Tim Pray, booshaway of the National Western in 1985, has two complete camps: that of a southwestern fur trader in the style of Santa Ana, and also an Indian lodge.

"Some rendezvousers have been through all phases," says John Arrasmith, a veteran of 400 rendezvous and Chief Dog Soldier at the National Western. "They've had lodges and wall tents. They've done mountain man, Indian and southwestern. Then others of us have always focused on one area. For me it's been Indian because that's 50 percent of my heritage.

Like Arrasmith, many men are discovering or claiming their Indian heritage, and making beaded and fringed buckskins. The historical mountain man wore calico shirts of pure cotton when he had them, and canvas pants until they wore out. From the Indians, he learned that buckskin trousers or a breech cloth and leggings stood up in the brush. Moccasins replaced his worn-out boots. He wore a floppy felt hat against the sun and rain, and a blanket coat called a capote. If he was accepted by a tribe, he often took an Indian wife -- and gained a tepee.

"Mountain men wore anything they

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF BUCKSKINNERS

"While the NMLRA is primarily for shooters, NAB was created for the buckskinner, as a counterbalance to the NMLRA. The goal is to maintain and honor the traditional camps and historical attitudes. The camp and people come first, traders second and shooting/sporting events third. If you have a good camp, you've got good traders, and you've got good shooters," says Barbara Pray, co-founder of NAB with her husband Tim. NAB's first rendezvous will be in 1990 in Colorado.

NAB, Dept. SOF
1981 E. 94th Ave.
Thornton, CO 80229
Tel. (303) 287-2443



ABOVE: The outfit of a soldier in the French-Indian War of 1754-63 isn't often seen at a Western Rendezvous. Here the participant is wearing a canvas hunting frock, a slouch "rifleman's" hat, a Huron Indian bag, a 1754 French sword and bayonette scabbard, canvas French-fly knee britches and a linen great coat. His self-made flintlock is an early Engle trade gun from 1760, smooth bore, 28 gauge (.55 caliber).



could get," concludes Jack Cardinel, a French-Canadian Shoshone Indian who makes knives and shields. "They were practical people."

Even the trapper's trusty muzzle loader differed from its Eastern counterpart for reasons of practicality. During the years of the fur trade, rifles were either flintlock or percussion. The original flintlocks appeared in the 1630s, when gunmakers perfected the mechanism, and even after the percussion cap simplified ignition in the early 1800s, the smooth-bore flintlocks were favored by many mountain men.

But to suit the rugged environment of the West, guns were made with a thicker,

stronger stock and barrel than the small-bore long rifles of the East. The over 60-inch long guns of the Pennsylvania rifle-makers evolved into the 53-inch full-stock flintlock Hawken or the 49-inch, half-stock Hawken. And to drop heavy game, the caliber became .52 or even .53, depending on the rifle-maker.

Today, an estimated 75 percent of the buckskinners at rendezvous compete in black powder matches. On the range, the sounds made by a muzzle loader are as unmistakable as its odor. First, there's the muffled whoosh of air as you force the ramrod down the barrel to seat the patch and lead ball. Then comes the silent concentra-

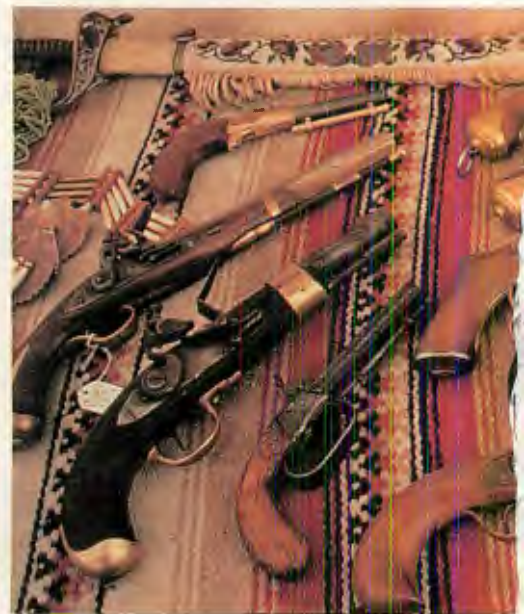
tion while you pour powder in the priming pan, or fit a percussion cap to the nipple. There's the gun's fiery blast, and the satisfying clink of lead hitting a metal target. Finally, there's the acrid cloud of sulfurous blue smoke wafting into your nostrils, making you want to shoot again. Only you have to clean the barrel first.

"The smell of the black powder gets in your blood," says Ray Ezinga, president of the Colorado State Muzzle Loading Association. "One guy I tried to warn, within two weeks after he got a black powder rifle, he bought a tepee and buckskins and sold all his modern guns."

At the National Western, shooters com-



LEFT AND BELOW: A husband and wife from New York wear handmade buckskins with authentic Crow Indian bead work, some of the best anywhere, according to experts; note detail of beaded belt and knife sheath.





LEFT: Black powder shooting is an integral part of rendezvous with participants competing in various contests. This is the block fort competition for a two-man team. One keeps the walls clear of ladders and invaders, while also lowering the door to enable his partner to shoot at various metal targets hidden in the field.

ABOVE: Rendezvousers dressed as "Comancheros," whom they describe as pre-1840 Spanish, southwestern fur trappers and "bandits." They wear sombreros, cotton shirts, vests, tight canvas trousers with a leather seat and high, black boots as they fire their 1836 Patterson revolvers during rendezvous. They say this nontraditional .36 caliber pistol was one of the first percussion revolvers.

pete in the block fort, "silhouette" and squirrel matches. Unlike black powder matches at state shoots and the NMLRA shoot at Friendship, they are required to wear pre-1840 dress. For prizes, Oak Smith and George Jackson got \$2,375 in Eisenhower silver dollars in Las Vegas.

"I always liked camping and I always liked shooting black powder," says George Stow of Elkmond, Indiana. "Then I found out you can do both at rendezvous."

Some mountain man matches test a variety of survival skills. Wearing their pre-1840s clothing, competitors must throw a tomahawk and make it stick, shoot at a Hawken gong at 130 paces, and shoot at an

axe blade to split the ball in two and break two clay pigeons. They have to set a snare with sticks and rocks, and start a fire using flint and steel. They shoot at spoons swinging in the wind and at the form of a prairie dog at 50 paces -- all within 30 minutes.

Their "speedloader" is a block of wood drilled with six holes and fitted with pre-patched lead balls. Their powder horns are full.

Sometimes they're even required to make their own rifle balls from galena, a widely occurring lead sulfide ore which was commonly used by pioneers for bullet making as it would direct-smelt over a hot fire to produce molten lead. Old-time gunmakers



ABOVE: Fur hats made from fox, wolverine, raccoon, and other exotics are available for purchase or trade, but skunk hats never seem to lose their odor when wet.

LEFT: Pistols, in all sizes, both flintlock and percussion, are available for the properly outfitted buckskinner.

BELOW: Mountain-man faces scrimshawed on walking sticks, although possibly not authentic pre-1840, are an example of a secondary market developed for rendezvous.

BELOW: Trade goods called plunder are available in abundance at rendezvous. Knives were essential to the trapper, and many modern mountain men make their own distinctive ones. In this case, handle scales are from the jawbone of a bear.



usually provided a bullet mold with each gun for casting the right size balls.

Rendezvousers also compete in (toma)-hawk and knife-throwing matches, and primitive archery with sinew-backed bows. Buckskinners often carried bows for hunting, getting off four or five shots with a bow and only one with a rifle.

It's at these matches that shooters gain a reputation, and sometimes a name. One man put a dry ball down his muzzle loader — twice. That means, twice during a timed match he got excited and forgot to put powder down the barrel before the patch and ball.

"He'll always be known as Two Balls," says Steell Fuller.

Like the rendezvous of old, a big part of modern get-togethers is buying and selling. The bigger rendezvous may have 400 traders, some professional suppliers, and "blanket traders" who made trade goods to finance their own buckskinning.

"People say you can come in one end of rendezvous stark naked and go out the other end completely outfitted," says Van Bethancourt, a criminal lawyer from Mesa, Arizona.

On trader's row at the National Western, you can buy complete sets of deer or elk-hide buckskins, pre-1840 style saddles,

leather for do-it-yourself clothing, moccasins, elk and buffalo hides, tepees, Venetian trade beads, hand-made Hawkins, daggers and skinning knives with handles of wood, antler or the jawbone of a bear. Hats made of fox perch atop wooden poles outside one trader's tent like trophy heads on lances, their paws blowing in the breeze, their red eyes staring into the sun.

Like most professional traders, "Old Bill" Henderson hits 30 or more rendezvous a year with his canvas tepees, wall tents, and pyramids. A former bank executive, he made his first lodge as a hobby, then traded his three-piece suit for buckskins, a pair of moose-hide moccasins etched with three claymore swords, and a wolverine hat.

"Sometimes I make as much here as I did banking," he says.

While some rendezvousers drop a fortune on their plunder, it's a matter of choice. A custom-built rifle can cost \$400 or \$3,000. A tepee 21 feet in diameter costs \$700, but a lean-to can be made out of a \$15 tarp. A single blue Chevron trade bead from the 1600s might cost \$400, and a rare red one well over \$3,000. A simple set of buckskins — leather shirt, leggings, and pants — can cost \$600, or \$1,500 with bead or quill work. Jerry Henry of Holley, New York, turned down \$750 for a beaded belt he made.

"Me, I go cheap," Jack Cardinel says of his breechcloth. "Maybe \$1.89."

"That's the thing about rendezvous," says Slowhand, a riflemaker from Tulsa, Oklahoma, so named after a rattlesnake bit him at rendezvous three years ago and he lost some use of his left hand. "You can make anything you want."

Modern rendezvous, for the few days they exist, have all the security, medical and sanitary needs of a small city. Booshways (a corruption of the French word bourgeois) are elected by the NMLRA membership on the merits of a site they propose. Segundos, Spanish for second, act as vice-mayors, and the chief dog soldier is the city police chief. He oversees a cadre of paramedics and deputies, and has the authority to call for law enforcement or emergency medical help.

"As much as we like to do pre-1840, it's still 1989 and you're never totally away from it," Arrasmith says. "When a situation gets beyond what we can handle, the real world steps in. But there's never been a serious civil disturbance."

Rendezvousers have their own code of ethics. According to tepee etiquette, sticks placed over the opening means that the lodge is locked. Maybe because of the simple fact that tents can't really be secured despite the valuables they hold, people

SMOKEPOLES OF THE MOUNTAIN MAN

Conversation at black powder shoots usually centers on the glories of having a good gun.

But whether the rifle is flintlock or percussion, the style Hawken or not, the patch lubricated with spit or moose milk, it's training that wins in the stiff competition, according to Fred Newcomb, three-time winner of the Colorado State Muzzle Loading Association (CSMLA) competition.

"Ninety-nine percent of the time, it's the man behind the gun that makes the difference," he says.

In 1987, Lone Elk, as Newcomb is called, used a custom-made in-line action percussion muzzle loader at the CSMLA match. It weighed a few ounces shy of 14 pounds, heavy for off-hand shooting. The caliber was .50. It was built with an erratic pistol-grip, Redfield Olympic front sight and Merit disk rear sight.

The match features two 25-yard targets, two 50-yard, and three 100-yard. One 50-yard and one 100-yard must be shot off the cross-stick, and the rest are done off-hand. A perfect score is 350. In 1987, Lone Elk shot 342, CSMLA's highest score ever.

The following year, the CSMLA board disallowed Lone Elk's rifle at the state championship shoot, making it a rule that only "traditional" off-hand hunting rifles could be used in

the match.

So in 1988, Lone Elk entered the competition with gun that conformed to National Muzzle Loading Rifle Association (NMLRA) rules. His traditional off-hand hunting rifle was a right-hand, percussion, half-stock, Hawken-style, .54 caliber. It weighed 8.5 pounds. He won the match with a score of 339, and became the first two-time winner of the CSMLA shoot.

"Lone Elk's the man to beat," shooters told each other at the match.

But good shooting is neither an accident nor luck, says Lone Elk, who is 50 and has been competing since 1983. In preparation for a match, he spends three hours at a time at the range, throwing a lot of lead toward a paper target and learning from his misses. He also spends two months in good, solid weight lifting, doing single-arm curls with 35-pound dumbbells, 50 reps each.

"You've got to key yourself up to win," he says. "Before the state shoot this year, I believed I could win. I had practiced so much, that I was one with my gun."

In July 1989, he took a left-hand flintlock to the match. It was a full-stock, early-style Hawken weighing a tad over 9 pounds. Although the gun's main spring broke, his score was still 333. It was the highest of the match, making him a three-time winner.

"They jokingly said that next year I'll have to use a firelock," he says.

But Lone Elk has decided to let someone else have the state shoot. He has a "deep desire" to go on to the NMLRA nationals, he says, held twice a year in Friendship, Indiana.

At a state match, shooters discuss such things as the weight of the load they're shooting, and the merits of patch thicknesses. Buckskinners are limited to using pre-1840 accessories, and therefore use spit on their patches. But state competitors douse their patches with moose milk — a formula of oil, water and peroxide. They spare the old-time hickory ramrod in favor of one made of fiberglass. They time themselves with electronic clocks.

"What the mountain man did for self-preservation, we've turned into a science," says Lone Elk.

Ray Ezinga, president of CSMLA puts it another way: "Guns are like women, once you find out what they like, they're fine. But until you do, they can be a total bitch."

These differences aside, the black powder shooters of today are ready to become the militia of tomorrow, should the need arise.

"You have to think about it, but these skills would be useful in case of a war," says Ray Ezinga. "In training men for Vietnam, they found that a lot of boys had never fired a gun. With the cities and the limited space, most dads don't go out with their kids and teach them to shoot anymore. It's a shame."

mind their business and don't touch gear that isn't theirs.

"You can walk off and leave anything out—even guns," says Steell Fuller. "Nobody ever touches it."

"You can't begin to tolerate a thief," adds Oak Smith. "It's the worst offense next to murder."

Akin to theft and mayhem, in some people's opinion, is a flagrant disregard of the dress code. According to the law of the camp, while Arrasmith and his deputies police for obvious signs of the 1980s, what's inside a lodge, so long as it's not visible, is considered a person's own business. Rendezvousers learn the art of camouflage, covering Coleman coolers and plastic water jugs with animal hides.

"We police authenticity," says Arrasmith. "Trade goods; if someone's selling something from 1850, we try to get them to put it away. Dress; we like for everyone to make a concerted effort to dress in pre-1840 in every respect."

But according to some hardliners, it's the popularity of rendezvous that is diluting its authenticity. Instead of it being a rowdy celebration of the primitive life, it is becoming a family vacation destination. For some people, coming to rendezvous adds the dimension of Halloween to camping.

According to Patrick McCarthy, the historical rendezvous was a "wild and drunken debauch." Now it is centered around two activities: training and shooting.

"Both are family-oriented situations," he adds.

"They trade their levis for leathers, their camper for a tepee," agrees Mike Guli of Rolling Thunder Ranch in Colorado.

The effect is that big, sanctioned rendezvous of the NMLRA may have lost their appeal for people who remember the intimate rendezvous of the 1970s.

"It used to be you'd go to rendezvous, and it was kinda like the old time doin's," says George Jackson. "There wasn't a lot of women. Darn few kids."

"Women weren't even allowed," corrects Oak Smith.

"You'd drink whiskey and you'd hu'-rah and you'd shoot anytime you wanted," adds George. "There'd be knife fights.



There'd be fistfights, but we didn't seem to mind. Now, the least little incident, you have to throw those folks out. Me and my old-time friends wouldn't even be able to get into this rendezvous."

During the National Western, Oak and George spent all one night dealing with men threatening to shoot each other. One of them was finally outlawed, causing hard feelings among his friends.

"Rendezvousers are tight," says Steell Fuller. "If you mess with one of them, you get them all."

Oak Smith readily agrees.

"Death threats are a little hard to take," he says. "How many have we had?"

"Five," George replies, drawing a .44 revolver out from under his bedroll. "You don't sleep with this under your pillow for no reason."

While people point to the normally friendly atmosphere at rendezvous—strangers in buckskins saying "Howdy" on the footpath—there exists the obvious differences found in any group of 3,000 people. The result is that a large camp like the National Western consists of "neighborhoods," just as in a city. Families tend to cluster their tepees, drawn together by companionable children. Howlers band together for the sake of being able to find their lodges after a hard night around the boogie fire.

Continued on page 68

ABOVE: Flintlocks and percussion guns overlapped in the time frame of the historical mountain man, and both are used by buckskinners.

BELOW: A small bore mountain gun overlooks lodges at the NMLRA 1989 Western National. Note the various types of lodges, the canvas tepees, pyramids and wall tents.



BELOW: Evening meal around the campfire is a time for rendezvousers to share food and tall tales. Here participants sample elk meat, venison and musk ox shot in Alaska with a black powder rifle. No one goes hungry, but in true muntain man etiquette, you must bring your own plate.



ECHOES OF HONOR

Of Tragedy, Treachery and a Pointman's Valor



Dignity does not consist of possessing honors, but of deserving them. — Aristotle

THE PLAIN OF REEDS, VIETNAM
AUGUST 1969

IT was the always-flooded, swamp-like region of the Mekong Delta, uninhabited and remote for thousands of years. Even the ancient Vietnamese knew that the seemingly endless flood plains could not support village life, let alone serve as reasonable farmland with its scattered head-high reeds, pockets of scrub brush, miles of twisted and tangled waterways, and plagues of poisonous snakes and other dangers that lurked in its wet, murky shadows.

And yet, it was precisely for these reasons that the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army used it as a major infiltration route to the South. The reeds could easily hide their sampans and soldiers, and the American and Allied Forces and their war hardware and equipment had difficulty operating in the region. So when the random helicopter gunship patrol spotted the large enemy unit in the open it was a "lucky" find, a chance encounter for the helicopter patrol and a costly mistake for *the enemy*. In the hasty battle that followed the Cobra gunships flew run after run on the out-gunned and outmaneuvered North Vietnamese Army unit. There was little to hide behind. While the reeds and scrub brush made great camouflage and concealment, it *made* lousy cover.

In the wake of the sudden battle a platoon of NVA soldiers lay wounded and dying. In Tan An a small quick-reaction force from Company E Rangers from the 3rd Brigade, 9th Infantry Division were hurriedly assembled and sent in by helicopter to deal with the ground situation. Six enlisted Rangers and one Provisional Reconnaissance Unit (PRU) pointman were heliported into the area and upon touchdown the kill zone was unusually quiet — but the quiet was only momentary as division gunships sprayed the kill zone in front of them, knocking out the few pockets of resistance.

"There were NVA bodies everywhere" said Mike Kentes, a team leader with Echo Company and one of the seven volunteers for the mission. "So we moved slowly and carefully among them, scouring the area for the survivors we knew were there." In the waist-high reeds it was a matter of flushing them out.



Corporal Mike Kentes, the feisty Echo Company LRP team leader who took up PRU Kiet's cause. Photo: courtesy Mike Kentes

Fortunately, the momentum was with the Rangers and their PRU pointman. "Our PRU was a Nung Chinese named Kiet. Distrusted by both the North and South Vietnamese because of his heritage he had offered his loyalty to us, proving himself as a LRP/Ranger time and again. True to form, when this mission came up, he volunteered and then took the point position like he usually did," added Kentes. Pushing through the bog and tangle of reeds, the small Ranger force came across the primary killzone, where the main force of enemy soldiers had been caught by the gunships. Bodies and equipment were scattered every-

where, but there was something more — something that Kiet brought to the attention of the Rangers.

"Kiet could see that they weren't your average NVA soldiers and said as much," added Thomas Dineen, Jr., another 75th Ranger from Echo Company who took part in the mission. "On closer examination we could see they were older, larger and better-dressed soldiers than anything we'd come across previously. Their weapons and equipment were better than what the VC in the area were using. I mean these guys had thick arms and chests and looked like weightlifters!"

Dineen and the others wondered about the dark color of their uniforms as well, and carefully they continued the search of the battle zone searching for more survivors or clues to who they were. "We knew they were special troops," Dineen added. "Just how special we'd find out later."

As the Rangers fanned out their search Sergeant Christopher Valenti found one NVA soldier hiding in the brush and when Valenti called for him to surrender in Vietnamese the lone soldier raised his hands and reluctantly stood up. It was also about that time when Kentes noticed that one of the "dead" soldiers was slowly reaching for something beneath him and when the Ranger corporal recognized what it was he fired two short bursts through the man. Upon closer inspection Kentes and the others saw the grenade that the soldier had intended to throw, his lifeless hand still wrapped around the deadly gray-green globe. Searching the body for papers, Kentes recovered what he could and then removed the 9mm Markarov pistol that the dead man wore at his side. "We knew he was an officer by the pistol but there was little else to go on, so we recovered the weapon and any intelligence materials we found and then called for an extraction," explained the Virginia-born soldier. "We knew the Military Intelligence people back in Tan An would make more sense of it, even though we had our own suspicions."

"The prisoner told Kiet that he was a supply sergeant and when Kiet questioned

by Kregg Jorgenson

WHISPER OF REEDS

When Rangers hit NVA soldiers infiltrating South through the Plain of Reeds, they cut deep into the enemy's supply lines, affecting his logistical strategy. Unofficial policy was to give indigenous troops — woefully underpaid — first grabs at captured gear as a token of appreciation for loyal service. Photo: courtesy Mike Kentes

JORGENSEN: JOURNALIST

CBS called Kregg Jorgenson “the sergeant who likes to walk point.” He called himself “a shake 'n' bake buck sergeant from Ft. Benning.” The truth must lie somewhere in between, as in Vietnam in 1969-1970 Jorgenson was awarded a Silver Star, two Bronze Stars, a Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry — and three purple hearts — while serving with H Co. (Rangers-LRRPs) 75th Infantry, and Recon Platoon, 1st of the 9th, 1st Cav Division. Jorgenson did seven years in the Army, three as a grunt and four as a journalist. Now living in the Northwest, he continues his journalistic pursuits. This is his third article for SOF.

him about the uniforms and equipment the guy hemmed and hawed, saying they were a new unit moving South, only we knew there was more to the story than what he was saying,” said Kentes.

It was back at Tan An, under closer scrutiny and interrogation by Division MI that the Rangers learned that the “Supply Sergeant” was, in fact, the personal physician to NVA Lieutenant General Hai Tranh and that the General had been killed in action among the reeds, along with most of his private bodyguards.

one thing. Real life something else entirely,” said Kentes.

Kentes had to hold LTG Tranh in high regard as a soldier, since the officer had decided to fight it out. Unfortunately, the MI people weren't too thrilled about the incident. After all, they had a file on LTG Tranh in Saigon that was as thick as a telephone book, and the book now was officially closed — the line dead.

Still, it was a costly blow to the enemy so any sour grapes gave way to a sense of celebration. As was the custom and practice of Echo Company, the PRUs were given first choice of the captured enemy weapons, and Kentes and Dineen were proud to present Kiet with the dead officer's pistol.

“The PRUs didn't get paid by the South Vietnamese government so each member of the Ranger teams chipped in \$10 each month to pay their salaries and we knew we were getting off cheaply too,” added Kentes. “Kiet was a hell of a pointman and tracker and he was someone we could always rely on in the field. To supplement Kiet and the other PRUs' equipment we always gave them first choice of any captured weapons. We knew that we were only over in Nam for a tour of duty or two, while Kiet and the others like him were caught up in a lifetime struggle. Kiet was honored by the gift and he thanked us for it. To him the pistol had status and it showed the others how much we thought of him. Even then, maybe it didn't show our appreciation enough to get the proper meaning across.

“As an ethnic Chinese Nung he wasn't well received by the Vietnamese, and to them he'd always be a stranger in a strange land. Kiet had been drafted into the South Vietnamese Army earlier in the war but he deserted them saying they were “too chicken shit” and when he came to the PRUs and began to work for us he said he was proud to serve with soldiers he could rely on. We learned a great deal from him and he became an indispensable part of our team and our company. I was happy for him and glad that he accepted the pistol,” Kentes said.

According to Kentes, the Commanding Officer of Echo Company wasn't pleased



The thick vegetation on the Plain of Reeds provided excellent concealment, but as the ambushed elite NVA detachment discovered, it provided very poor cover. Photo: courtesy Mike Kentes



“High” ground in the area consisted of a few feet difference in elevation, here affording a sniper and his M21 a rare field of fire. Photo: courtesy Mike Kentes.

Once again the same Ranger force was assembled and sent back out, to recover the body of this high-ranking NVA officer. The general's doctor led the Rangers right to his body, still lying where he had tried to pull the pin on the grenade, much to the dismay of Kentes. The Echo Company Ranger team leader, as well as the others, knew the potential value of such a high ranking prisoner, but they also knew that the General hadn't given him much choice.

“I knew the Military Intelligence people wouldn't be too thrilled about having a dead enemy general on their hands as opposed to the potential intelligence coup of a live enemy general, but then they didn't have to capture the prisoners. Textbook theory is

with Kentes' decision and asked that the pistol be turned over to him. Kentes told his CO that it went against the established company policy to do so, and besides they'd already presented the pistol to Kiet as a gift; the corporal politely refused to get it back. Then, when the captain ordered him to turn over the pistol the feisty Ranger team leader smiled and asked to discuss the matter with the Brigade Inspector General. Upon return the Company Commander assured Kentes that he only wanted the pistol for the Ranger Headquarters or the Infantry Museum at Ft. Benning, Georgia and that he didn't intend to keep it for himself. Neither did the Brigade's Commander, Colonel Dale

Critenburger, who ordered the Company Commander to deliver it to the Ranger headquarters at Ft. Benning since the captain was getting "short."

Kentes and Dineen didn't like it, but that was the Army's solution and that was that. Reluctantly, they approached Kiet to explain the situation, only to learn that while Kentes was still lodging his complaint with the Inspector General the pistol had been "confiscated."

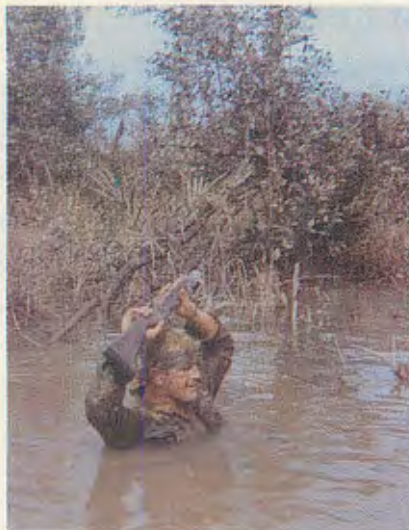
"I felt lousy for Kiet. We'd honored him and then offhandedly snatched it back. Some honor, huh? The CO may have had the pistol but he never had our respect," Kentes added.

To soothe any harsh feelings Kiet was given a leave to visit his family, but on the way home he was picked up by the South Vietnamese police and charged with desertion. When several PRUs in the company came to Kentes and Dineen with this news, the two veteran Rangers immediately went to the company commander to see what he could do. After all, Kiet was in his command and was considered by the others in the company to be a "fellow Ranger." Besides, how could it *really* be desertion when he left a South Vietnamese unit that ran from battle to join a Long Range Reconnaissance unit that sought it out?

"We'd hoped the CO would either call the prison and explain the situation to the authorities or at least contact the Vietnamese liaison officer to resolve the problem, only the CO refused our request," stated Dineen. "That was contrary to past practice. Moreover, the CO refused us a jeep to go to Saigon to straighten things out and told us 'not to become involved in Kiet's situation,'" Dineen added. Both of the Rangers wondered whether the incident with LTG Tranh's pistol had anything to do with the CO's attitude, but dismissed the thought.

However, since the CO's decision didn't sit well with either of them, Rangers Dineen and Kentes "borrowed" a jeep and with \$50 MPC between them they took off toward the prison to see if they could work out a "deal" with the prison officials.

At the run-down facility they asked the guard at the gate if they could speak to someone in charge. Since both LRPs were well armed the guard refused to let them in and called for an officer in charge. When a small, cocky police official appeared the two Rangers explained the situation to him and the police official said he couldn't just release the prisoner. However, a deal could be worked out, and when the police official asked how much they were willing to pay the Rangers told him all they had was \$50 MPC. The police official shook his head saying it wasn't enough and then fearing that they might take matters into their own hands he scurried back inside the prison's gate and ordered the guards to keep an eye on the two Americans. "Liberating" Kiet wasn't that far out of the picture either, but weighing the options and studying the situation Dineen and Kentes angrily returned to



The Everglades of the Delta, the Plain of Reeds offered water infiltration routes for the NVA, and slow, wet patrolling for the Rangers. Here LRP team member keeps his M16 with M203 dry. Photo: courtesy Mike Kentes

the company, hoping either to collect enough money to free Kiet or cause enough pressure in the command to have them act on his behalf. Before they could reach their goal the news came down that Kiet had been court-martialed and sent to a South Vietnamese Army unit where he'd serve out his sentence, which was to serve as an ammo bearer for the Vietnamese Army. To top things off the former Ranger pointman and scout wouldn't even be allowed to carry a weapon.

"It was a complete waste of someone like Kiet," said Kentes. "Here was one of the finest combat Rangers I ever knew not even allowed to fight! He was a real Ranger and not someone who just had the patch. It hurt to think he was treated that way after all he did for us. Even the other PRUs in the company, many who had similar backgrounds to Kiet's, wondered why the CO didn't do something to help him. After all, they said, 'Aren't we working for you? Aren't we fighting on the same side?' Jesus, we didn't know what to tell them. I mean, wasn't the PRU program set up to assist the Special Operations and LRP/Ranger units? There was nothing to say," Kentes added shaking his head. "The inaction or the seemingly official indifference spoke for itself."

That seeming indifference left a sour taste in the mouths of the two Rangers, not to mention its effect on their attitude toward their CO, who they felt should have done something to help the loyal Kiet.

It wasn't long afterward that the CO rotated home, taking Kiet's Makarov pistol with him. Nor was it long afterward that Dineen and Kentes heard that Kiet had been killed in action, leaving the two Rangers who'd tried to help him to shoulder the news with grief and a sense of frustration. It

would be that grief and frustration that would carry their mission through to another level of fighting.

Kentes and Dineen later went on to hold offices in the 75th Ranger Association of Vietnam, and in their positions made inquiries as to the disposition of LTG Tranh's pistol. When it was learned that the pistol never made it to either the Infantry Museum or the Ranger Headquarters' historical display area, and that the former company commander still had it in his possession, the two Rangers set out to complete their 17-year-old mission.

"The CO hadn't turned the pistol over to the museum," said Kentes. When the two Rangers learned that the former captain was now a lieutenant colonel in a reserve outfit they worked through unofficial Army channels to get him to "do the right thing." There are active-duty generals who are in the Ranger Association, and with their assistance they got him to turn Kiet's Makarov over to the Ranger regiment where

COMPANY COMMANDER'S STORY

Other accounts have referred to Kiet's Makarov as a "Czech-made Makarov." This is unlikely, as only the Sovs, ChiComs, East Germans and Bulgarians have made Makarovs, although the Czechs and Hungarians have made many *other* Walther-PP-type handguns. As part of the editing process for this article we needed to nail down whether the pistol was a Czech-made something else, or a somebody-else-made Makarov. As the LRP team members had seen the pistol for only a short time (just a little longer than Kiet had seen it), we contacted the company commander who had it for 17 years until it was placed in the Ranger historical display.

In the course of the conversation, the company commander's version of how the Makarov pistol incident was handled also came to light.

SOF: I've found that in print it's referred to as a Czech-made Makarov which it can't be because the Czechs never made any. Can you tell me what the country of manufacture was?

CC: Well, it's interesting that you say that. What I understand it to be — it was a Czech 9mm Makarov that was made in Czechoslovakia but is obviously of Russian origin. I've got all the papers that tell me what it is when I brought it in as a war souvenir. In fact, it's funny that you bring that up. I was just writing up the history on how [the Makarov] was captured by one of my teams so that it goes in there [to the Ranger Department] as a history because they wanted to put it with the weapon. What may have happened is that in the translation — and I'm repeating what I was told because I'm



it is on display today in the regimental historical area. "The pistol is more than someone's personal war trophy," said Kentes, "it's a tribute to Kiet and others like him who gave so much to the Rangers and asked for little in return. They taught us to write the manuals on jungle warfare operations and, too, maybe they taught us something about honor and duty in the process. The pistol was a gift from the Rangers to Kiet, an honor for him — and today, it honors his memory." ✕

What's the value of a general's pistol? Most often issued in ComBloc armies as a badge of rank, very few Makarovs were used in Vietnam, fewer still captured. A Soviet design ripoff of the Walther PP, Makarovs have probably been made only in the USSR, East Germany, China and Bulgaria. Illustrated is a Chinese-made version. Photo: Peter G. Kokalis

brigade commander at that time and said, "What do we do with this thing?" and he said, "Well, rather than give it to one person, since there were more than one that shot the man, let's go ahead and just hold it and then maybe one day you may want to put it up for the museum." And that's exactly what we did.

SOF: Who had it?

CC: At the time it was kept in our safe, period. When it was taken, it was taken by the team leader, and then Kentes felt that it was his and that's when the squabble started, so I just took it up and put it in the safe and that was it. So nobody had it.

SOF: I suppose it would be a desirable collector's item. There's not that many Makarovs that I've seen that came out of Southeast Asia.

CC: That's right. It was the only one taken that I knew of, and secondly it was the only one ever taken off a general much less. And he was the highest guy ever caught or hit like that. I talked to my first sergeant, Press, and my officers and we thought that this was something that we ought to keep and one day [put] into a museum at Benning. When I got [a call] on it. . . I [was] called if I had anything that would be of interest to put in the Ranger museum because I was one of the company commanders of one of the Ranger companies. And that's how the whole thing came down.

So as a result of multiple interviews and correspondence, including the above, this editor reached two conclusions:

- (1) That the pistol was in all probability a Chinese-made Makarov.
- (2) That it is appropriate the men wanted the pistol dedicated to the memory of Kiet.

— Don McLean

not the one that can verify that if it was manufactured there — I can tell you that. . . it is a 9mm Makarov.

SOF: If I was to make a wild guess, I would guess maybe Chinese and somebody wrote CH on the form and it got interpolated.

CC: You know what, that's very interesting because on it they do have stamped CH; so maybe Czechoslovakia [was taken] instead of China.

SOF: The pistol was stamped CH on the form?

CC: I think the form was [stamped CH].

SOF: I'll bet you that may have been the cause of confusion. Can you give me a brief recap of how you happened to get it, what the story behind it was?

CC: Basically there was a team, my Ranger team; at the time I was company commander of Echo Company, 75th. And there was a team of — I think I had six guys on the ground and I was flying C&C [command & control] at the time. And they got into the fight and there were about 14 people, three of them female nurses, all armed. I then inserted another team. They were able to wipe out all 14 people. In the group was this general. What happened was, a couple of things interesting — one, his bodyguard was about a 6-foot-2 Chinese.

SOF: That's good sized even for a Chinese.

CC: He was big. Cropped hair, khaki, the whole nine yards. There was no doubt where he was from. We got about 60 pounds of documents out of the whole thing because he was coming back from Cambodia when we hit him. I'm talking about the general and his people. And that was really it. There were, God, I

think — I'm trying to recall who my team leader on the ground was at the time. Either Sergeant Christianson, Staff Sergeant Christianson or — I've got it written down or — I had one of my staff sergeants that was handling the one team that went in. There were a couple of other things — Kentes was a buck sergeant, acting buck sergeant; Christianson, the team leader, was an E6 if I'm not mistaken but I'm trying to remember what his name is. Anyway, I've got it all written down and it will be part of that history that I send down there. One of the things — there's a controversy behind that weapon [as] there's some argument as to who killed the general. Kentes says to this day that he was the guy who killed him which is not true because there were three guys who fired at the general, because what he was doing was raising up to throw a hand grenade and three guys blew him.

SOF: I'd imagine everyone in the area would be shooting.

CC: Well, of course. And so to stop the whole thing I took [the pistol] and confiscated it. I shouldn't say confiscate; I put it in the safe, and knew that one day I was going to do what I did on behalf of the company and that was not to give it on behalf of [myself] but to give it on behalf of Echo Company, the Rangers. And that is how it was given. And of course, Kentes felt that it was his weapon and I told him right to his face that it wasn't. And that's unfortunate. But he still harbors that. . . But the bottom line was, that was a kill and that was a weapon that was a very different kind of weapon so I think we made a decision early. In fact I made it jointly with our

EMBERS OF A B

FMLN Guerrillas Beaten with Bullets and Ballots

Text & Photos
by David Nott

“THEY lobbed a bomb, fired one burst and disappeared in the dark,” the sergeant said while reporting to the duty officer in the regimental guard-room. “ *Parece que fue un RPG-7*” (“It sounded like an RPG-7”), he said. The signalman, laughing, his backpack radio resting on a bench, was miming how he dived for the dirt when the projectile exploded. It had landed behind a police post

the army patrol occupied the night before. Hefting their M16s they had ducked across dead ground into a tree line to flush out the attackers. “*Nada. Ni un rastro*” (“Not a trace”), the sergeant said.

The place was the northwest perimeter of San Salvador, capital of El Salvador, Central America. The occasion was another hit-and-run attack by the communist-led guerrillas of Farabundo Marti National Libera-

SALVADOR SCRIBE

David Nott is an Englishman currently writing a novel in Guatemala. He already has four book credits to his name, writing on topics as diverse as Amazon jungle expeditions and fictional thrillers. Before turning to writing he served two years as an officer in the British light infantry and later became a member of 21 SAS. We welcome his first contribution to SOF.

BELOW & BOTTOM CENTER: Atlacatl commandos with war paint and weapons during a training exercise.



RUSH FIRE WAR

tion Front (FMLN). The soldiers were redberet commandos of the Atlacatl Battalion, the first of the Immediate Reaction Infantry battalions (BIRI), of the Salvadoran army.

The attack was one of 42 incidents in one week of last July. There were 24 skirmishes, four bomb attacks, three mine detonations, three night dynamite attempts on electric power pylons, four guerrilla desertions and four arms caches discovered. Casualties, according to army bulletins: 13 guerrillas KIA, wounded unknown, 37 captured; army two KIA, six WIA.

Twenty-six weapons were seized, including six Soviet AK-47s, 3,200 rounds of ammunition, two Soviet RPG-7s, 45 PG-7 warheads and seven field radios, 183 blocks

of TNT, 25 pounds of crude gunpowder, 500 yards of fuse, several lengths of piping for homemade mortars and 3 "rampas," or catapults, for lobbing bombs.

These 42 incidents marked one week in a war now 10 years old, in a country the size of Massachusetts, with a population under six million. It began in 1980 when, encouraged by the overthrow of Somoza in Nicaragua in 1979 and convinced that there could be no political advance against the power of

Armored personnel carrier, UR416, with Mercedes engine and .50-caliber machine gun (set up for left-handed firing) fords river in front of bridge blown by guerrillas.

the Salvadoran oligarchy and a conservative military, the guerrillas launched their armed struggle.

The cost so far has been 70,000 dead, mostly civilians, \$2 billion in loss of production and damage, including \$60 million sabotage to the electrical grid alone.

The adversaries in the war are on the one hand the U.S.-backed, 56,000-man security forces, up from 25,000 in 1985, which includes army, national guard, national police, treasury police and customs police. On the other side, some 6,000 marxist guerrillas.

BELOW: Cavalry Regiment commandos practice snap-firing.



BELOW: French Panhard AML armored cars and German UR416 APCs ford river.



THE ARMY

When the guerrillas launched their first offensive on 16 October 1979, the army was caught off balance. One day before, reformist officers had toppled the repressive de facto regime of General Carlos Humberto Romero which had ruled since 1977, and internal friction was high. The government was in any case unprepared. It had never envisioned that insurgents would attempt to wage irregular warfare in so small a country, with no equivalent of the Vietnam jungle for cover. The army was geared for traditional set-piece operations. In the next four years it paid in blood for this error. Although it withstood the 1981 guerrilla "final offensive," thousands of civilians became casualties. After 1985 the guerrillas shifted to hit-and-run tactics which are costing lives even today. In the two years leading up to June 1984 the army lost close to 6,000 dead and wounded.

To counter this the Salvadoran army, whose first contingent of 60 officers and NCOs began stateside training at Fort Bragg in October 1982, formed its BIRI, or im-

mediate reaction battalions, among them Atlacatl, Atonal, Belloso, Bracamonte and Arce. These units, together with helicopter gunships and light attack planes, broke up the insurgents' field formations by 1985. The guerrillas then changed to small mobile units and began to extensively use mines and booby traps. Again the army was slow

to react. Beginning in 1986, however, they began to deploy Long Range Reconnaissance Patrols (LRRPs), Special Anti-Terrorist Service units (SEATs) and several commando units raised by individual brigade commanders. One of these, the Ninja of the 6th Brigade in Usulután, patrols in black and trains walking barefoot on beds of



GUERRILLA GROUPS

When the five guerrilla groups teamed up to form the FMLN in 1980 they also formed a productive political alliance, the Democratic Revolutionary Front (FDR), with non-Marxist, left-wing political leaders. Heading these were Guillermo Ungo, social democrat, and Ruben Zamora, Christian socialist. Both declared at the time that the democratic and electoral process, and thus social reform, was blocked by the oligarchy and its allies in the military, leaving armed struggle as the only alternative. This FDR-FMLN bond for years persuaded foreign governments, political parties and the media that the guerrillas were sincere in their announced aims of mixed economy, political pluralism and non-alignment. For many they became Robin Hood.

The international success of the FDR was not matched at home. It formed the Democratic Convergence Party to contest the March national elections, which their old allies sought to sabotage, and came out with 3.8 percent of the vote to 53 percent for their arch-enemy, the right-wing Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA).

The five guerrilla groups themselves maintain public unity as do the Sandinistas in Nicaragua because without it they would become inoperative. But internal frictions continue. The groups are:

People's Revolutionary Army (ERP), the main group led by Joaquin Villalobos, 38, a first-rate ruthless, willful guerrilla commander, who has never wavered from his Marxist-Leninist aims since he was a student agitator 20 years

ago. Their aim, of course, is power. In 1975 he ordered the execution of fellow guerrilla Roque Dalton on the charge of being a double agent. In fact he was eliminating his main rival. Like Daniel Ortega, revolutionary president of Nicaragua, Villalobos is a pragmatist. He will fight, negotiate, cajole, ally with non-Marxists, adopt any tactic that will further his aim.

Armed Forces of National Resistance (FARN). Led by Eduardo Sancho Casta Neda, 42, alias Ferman Cienfuegos, they split from the ERP in 1975 in part because of the Dalton affair. Neda is the least doctrinaire of the FMLN leaders and is sometimes labelled as no more Marxist than a radical social democrat.

Popular Liberation Forces (FPL). Its original leader Salvador Cayetano Carpio, alias Comandante Marcial, was the arch-exponent of "prolonged popular warfare." He joined the underground Salvadoran Communist Party in 1947 and split in 1970 because of its reluctance to launch armed struggle. In 1984 Salvador Cayetano Carpio's Revolutionary Workers Movement broke off to maintain the old chief's line. They haven't been heard from since.

Armed Forces of Liberation (FAL). The armed wing formed by the Communist Party when it finally decided to join the fight. Its leader and party secretary-general is the son of Palestinian immigrants, Jorge Shafik Handal, 58, whose 13-page apologia for coming in late is a monument to Marxist dialectic.

In 1980 he was the guerrilla envoy to Russia, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Hungary, Ethiopia and Vietnam to ask for arms.

Central American Workers Revolutionary Party, a minuscule group which has worked for years to become a central regional organization, without success. Its leader is Robert Roca, 41.

The FMLN taken as a whole would likely negotiate. However, up to now it has imposed unacceptable pre-conditions: It will not lay down arms; it wants recognition as a representative force with a constituency among the people (which would amount to legalization).

It would come to the table with unreasonable demands such as a purge among military officers and the merging of its own troops into a new army. The army has said it would accept negotiations but only under strict adherence to the constitution. As its laws do not allow the existence of any armed entity except the armed forces, the FMLN would have to lay down its arms. Villalobos has said there will be no economic or political progress unless the FMLN is part of the power structure that brings it about.

This is a common stand-off between a legal government and insurgents. This situation applies now in Guatemala where guerrillas have been active for almost 30 years. It's effectively a stalemate as each side makes demands it knows the other side can't, or won't, grant. Until one or both parties decide to compromise there can be no solution.



nails. The army says these units are now forcing the guerrillas increasingly off the battlefield and into terrorist acts in the cities. In addition, regular army units have learned to use several techniques to negate the mine threat. Troops use metal hooks attached to long poles to snag tripwires, long poles are used to probe suspicious spots on the trail (the ensuing blast tends to produce light as opposed to serious wounds) and villagers — as tired of mines as anyone — are providing more information.

El Salvador's badly hit economy, however, cannot meet the cost. The army and security forces get about \$95 million a year in American military aid. This is made up entirely of supplies — weapons, ammo, kit, uniforms, rations and medicines — no cash. Pay for soldiers and officers takes about 80 percent of the nation's own defense budget. The defense budget itself approaches 50 percent of the nation's total budget, up from 35 percent in 1985 and eight percent in 1979.

THE GUERRILLAS

Today's guerrilla groups formed their first war chests of an estimated \$60 million by ransom and protective "taxes." They killed and kidnapped wealthy Salvadorans, businessmen from the United States, Europe and Japan, and diplomats from Switzerland and South Africa. In Havana in 1980 these groups (see sidebar) and the Salvadoran Communist Party united under pressure from Fidel Castro to form the DRU (United Revolutionary Directorate). Later the same year the minuscule Revolutionary

Infantryman from the Cavalry Regiment crosses river in advance of armor.

er, that ultra-right-wing elements remain in the party. Senator Christopher Dodd, during a visit in July, said U.S. aid could be suspended if this conservative government was linked to death squads. Cristiani has maintained his offer to seek a negotiated settlement with the guerrillas with no conditions except the rejection of the FMLN's claim for a share of power. They have to earn it in fair elections, he says.

He continues the distribution of land to campesinos and champions economic and social justice as a major weapon against the claims of the guerrillas. His success in the next 18 months will determine the course of the war.

But there is more to it than that. Should this freely elected right-wing government succeed in solving, even partially, El Salvador's problems, Washington and particularly the liberals and media will have to adjust their now cemented ideas about Latin America as a whole. Achievement by conservative Cristiani will stand in high contrast to the wrecking of economies by left-of-center governments in other nations.

POLITICS LEADING TO COMBAT

A right-wing government cleanly and fairly elected, a phenomenon in recent Latin American history, took power in El Salvador on June 1, 1989. The president is coffee grower and businessman Alfredo Cristiani, 41. His party is ARENA, the Nationalist Republican Alliance, whose platform is law and order and free enterprise. Its main founder is famed former national guardsman Major Roberto D'Aubuisson, accused by civil rights groups, the press and American diplomats of authoring right-wing, anti-communist violence in the early '80s. He is currently the most popular politician in the country.

The ARENA government took over from the Christian Democrats under President Napoleón Duarte who was

elected with the full support of Washington in 1984. His was to be the regime to put through the reforms considered to be the antidote to insurrection. A major reason for his failure was government corruption.

Historians will say that his major contribution to the political development of his country and the region was to survive in office to hand over to a successor after a clean election. He was himself the first freely elected president El Salvador had known.

The swing to the right was substantially a reaction to Duarte's failure. Cristiani came in with 53 percent of the vote in an election the guerrillas had sworn to disrupt. Since he took office Cristiani has gone all out to establish an image of moderation and his patent personal decency has won over many democrats in Washington. Some still believe, however,

Party of Central American Workers joined in to form the FMLN. And in August 1985 it announced the fusion of the five armed wings into one army.

The guerrillas were estimated to have 10,000 men under arms in 1984. Today, estimates run from 3,000 to 6,000. A cache of their weapons uncovered by police on 30 May in the capital (in time for inspection by visiting Vice President

SOF IN EL SALVADOR

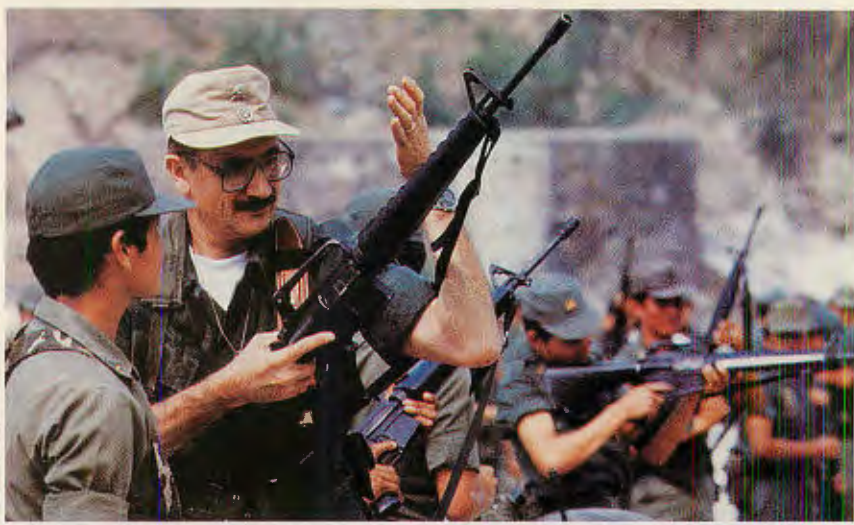
In February 1983 a team led by SOF Editor/Publisher Robert K. Brown made a preliminary trip to Guatemala, El Salvador and Costa Rica. This included meeting people in all three countries, a quick but comprehensive tour of guerrilla-infested areas in up-country Guatemala, an even quicker but quite searching course at the Guatemalan army's jump school (three jumps the same morning on a very hard drop zone) and another jump with the Salvadoran airborne at Ahuachapan. If we had known then what we later found out about the rigger shop of the Salvadoran airborne, there would have been much less assurance in our otherwise faultless exits from the C-47.

The trip to Costa Rica included long conversations with leaders of the "Southern Front" of the Nicaraguan resistance and a visit to their base camps along the border with Nicaragua.

We found that the U.S. Mil Group in El Salvador consisted of very dedicated, competent officers and NCOs, but not nearly enough of them, and working under crippling and unrealistic restrictions. Too many things that urgently needed doing, a lot of them things within our capabilities, weren't being done. Since, at that time the CIA had something of a monopoly on helping the Nicaraguan resistance, and the Guatemalans had their own situation reasonably well in hand, it was not hard to decide where to concentrate our efforts.

Most of the resources for this effort came out of the net cash flow of SOF magazine. Significant amounts of money and especially medical supplies were donated to and distributed by Refugee Relief International, Inc.; the readers also donated substantial quantities of combat boots, cammie and fatigue uniforms, web equipment and so on to our El Salvador/Nicaragua Defense Fund. Peter Kokalis, John Donovan, Dr. John Peters and quite a few others donated their time and expertise, without pay, to our training team efforts. All of them, including Brown and the SOF staffers who went, accepted the hazards of being in a guerrilla war zone where urban assassination was not unheard of. We were both careful and lucky.

So we were back in El Salvador in April 1983 with a nine-man team. Team



SOF Technical editor Peter G. Kokalis instructs Salvadoran troops on function of M16A1 rifle. Photo: SOF staff

members gave demolitions training, including writing an explosives storage SOP (Standard Operating Procedure), put on a sniper school, and gave classes and maintenance assistance for machine guns for the Atlacatl Battalion, one of the elite immediate reaction battalions (BIRI), surveyed assistance needs and gave some help to the Airborne Battalion's rigger loft. Doc Peters had a look at the then appalling state of military medicine in the Salvadoran army and conducted classes in emergency life-saving procedures for Salvadoran enlisted medics. We also made an overnight field trip with elements of the Airborne Battalion to get an idea of how they operated in the field; this included a relatively minor firefight with the G's.

This trip generated a rather elaborate after-action report stating our findings and recommendations. This set the agenda for most of the rest of our effort in El Salvador and also served as a vehicle for briefing several fairly senior folk in DoD and elsewhere in Washington on what was really going on at the working face in El Salvador. It was basically a case of a better-than-average banana republic army in the process of learning to fight a state-of-the-art Communist-led guerrilla insurgency in an atmosphere of poverty-stricken improvisation. Basic things like boot socks and magazine pouches they simply didn't have, even in elite units like the Atlacatl and the airborne. At that time there were zero — count 'em — zero dedicated medevac helicopters in the Salvadoran air force (FAS). We like to think that our after action report had something to do with the rather slow-moving but eventually effective official effort to correct this. In the meantime, on one of our later trips, Doc Peters, John Padgett and a couple others got busy and trained the FAS's door gunners in the basics of keeping wounded men alive in the chopper. Further, we found out that the door gunners hadn't had training on the firing and maintenance of the very old worn-out M60Ds with which they were

equipped. Since there were at that time no gunships at all in-country, when you needed close-in helicopter fire support, what you got was the door guns on the slicks. As Brown pointed out, the 20 or so door guns in the FAS's slicks were the most important machine guns in the country. So "John Doe" and Peter Kokalis also trained the door gunners as door gunners.

There were several other trips in 1983 and 1984, generally consisting of from six to 12 people. In addition to our work with the door gunners, we supported the Airborne Battalion, the Atlacatl, Morazan, Lenca and Reagan battalions, elements of the 3rd Brigade at San Miguel and La Union and the FAS's Airbase Defense Battalion. Training subjects included: sniper and M16 marksmanship, anti-ambush/immediate action drills, small unit tactics, instruction on firing, maintenance and repair of M60, M60D and .50 caliber machine guns, rigging training, advice and assistance in the conduct of airborne and airmobile operations, demolitions training, 60mm and 81mm mortar training. The medics gave training to troops and civilians on basic field sanitation and first aid, and to enlisted medics on their work. One of the high points was on 12 August 1983 when quick action by John Padgett and his assistant saved the lives of two wounded airborne soldiers at San Francisco Gotera in Morazan.

At this point the reader is permitted to ask, "And what the hell was the Mil Group doing?" The answer is, all they could, and a lot more than you'd expect considering that there were only 55 of them and under crippling restrictions. At the working level our relationship with



SOF Editor/Publisher Robert K. Brown with commander of Morazan Department, Lt. Col. Jorge Cruz. Photo: SOF staff

the Mil Group was always excellent. One or two individuals apparently saw in us a threat to their "territorial imperative" and some took longer than others in getting used to our being there. After all, this was a wholly new thing; it is not too much to say that Brown invented the "private sector" in 1983. There was also a period in which the left-wing press was alleging that SOF teams were being used to "cheat on the 55-man limit," and the Mil Group was under orders to have no contact with us. Otherwise, we always kept them informed on what we were doing, and also were very careful to coordinate with the senior Salvadoran commanders to insure that we were doing what they felt most needed being done and not duplicating other efforts. Generally, though, this was a period in which both the Salvadorans and the Mil Group were spread pretty thin and therefore grateful for help even from such unorthodox sources as SOF, especially after they found out that we didn't promise things we weren't able to do, had very well-qualified, competent people,

didn't talk out of school and didn't do animal acts in bars.

"Amateurs study strategy; professionals study logistics." We were also able to provide considerable maintenance help to the various supported units with their machine guns, small arms, PRC-77 and other radios, and with the rigger loft of the Airborne Battalion. This included providing significant quantities of spare parts and a very well-received item, over 120 handsets for PRC-77 radios. The problem here was that they had been issued the modular, non-repairable handsets; these are great if you have an unlimited supply of replacements, which they didn't. They had not been told not to blow into the mike, or the bit about putting a small plastic bag over it to keep out moisture. The handsets that we provided them were the old kind that can be taken apart and fixed. Meanwhile, RRI delivered about 4½ million dollars worth of donated medical supplies, most of which were delivered well forward to the using units in small quantities. We all did our share of humping cardboard boxes. RRI — meaning Doc Peters, John Padgett and a few other volunteers — also conducted sick calls for soldiers and medical civic action in a whole list of out of the way and insecure places, gave numerous classes to soldiers and civilians on first

Dan Quayle) included 343 Soviet AKs, three Soviet machine guns with tripods, 88 Hungarian 9mm pistols with 184 magazines, 10 Soviet RPG-7s, 30 Soviet RPG-18s, 50 Soviet F1 fragmentation grenades, and more than one million AK rounds (a random check showed these to be from Cuban Factory 13, dated 1988).

Continued on page 70

aid, field sanitation and so on, and trained a lot of enlisted medics, and the FAS's door gunners in basic life-saving techniques.

In May 1984, the G's launched a multi-battalion attack against the Cerron Grande hydro-electric plant, which is the major source of electricity for San Salvador city and most of the country. The troops on-site stood their ground. Predictably the various units that reacted to the alarm by road were ambushed and got tied down shooting their way out of the ambushes. The FAS got word of the attack at 0400. At 0600 the first lift of 10 choppers carrying 100 paratroopers took off; they made 10 lifts in all moving in the whole Airborne Battalion, who killed a lot of G's, took very few casualties and had the whole situation sorted out before the road-bound elements got there. And the lights in San Salvador went on that night as usual. It was the last multi-battalion effort by the G's for a long, long time, and a significant victory for the friendlies. A few months before, SOF's "John Doe" who had done similar things in Rhodesia, advised and helped plan an airborne/airmobile training operations down to the civilian airport at Comalapa, in effect a dress rehearsal of the "real thing" at Cerron Grande. It was the first time that the Salvadorans had done it, and helped convince them that such operations are not an impossible mystery reserved only for gringos, but actually quite possible when you have all the necessary components.

About this time also Napoleon Duarte, who was politically palatable even to the liberals in Congress, was elected President of El Salvador, and the flow of U.S. Government support for the Salvadorans significantly increased. The SOF effort continued on a declining scale during 1985. We did get involved with the Arce Battalion at San Miguel. This included recon platoon, mortar and medical training and participation with them in Operation "Carlos" in northern Morazan in February 1986. We were there for a major MedCap and civic action exercise and a minor firefight at Perquin on 6 February 1986.

Since about mid-1986, however, our main effort has been in support of the Nicaraguan freedom fighters, but that's another story.

— Alex McColl

SOF EXCLUSIVE

STRIKING BACK

**Oliver North's
Secret War
on Terror**

by Neil Livingstone
& David Halevy



In 1985-86 the United States began to strike back against the terrorist organizations — and their state sponsors — that for years had kidnapped and murdered American nationals with impunity. No man played a more central role in organizing and directing that counterattack than Lieutenant Colonel Oliver North. In his forthcoming book, *The Cult of Counterterrorism* (Lexington Books, 1989), author Neil C. Livingstone for the first time reveals the full extent of North's behind-the-scenes contributions to the war against international terror and the extraordinary means by which he waged it. This article, the first of two, is taken from the book.



LOST in all of the clamor over the Iran/Contra crisis is the remarkable role played by Oliver North in U.S. efforts to combat terrorism during the Reagan administration. After nearly two decades of suffering terrorist outrages without visible response, during the early 1980s the United States struck back at terrorists and their state sponsors both publicly and covertly, and Oliver North was never far from the action.

"Ollie North's biggest contribution to Western society," observed a top Israeli intelligence official, "was his ability to persuade American decision makers to take active measures against international terrorism." Indeed, North had many admirers within the Israeli defense and intelligence establishments. They saw in him the virtues of toughness, courage, and self-reliance that they so often extolled. North, in return,

SHADOW WAR EXPERTS

Neil C. Livingstone and David Halevy are two of the world's leading authorities on international terrorism and the deadly shadow wars in the Middle East.

Livingstone is an adjunct professor at Georgetown University. He has written numerous articles and books on terrorism and national defense, including *Beyond the Iran-Contra Crisis: The Shape of U.S. Counter-Terrorism Policy in the Post-Reagan Era*, published by Lexington Books.

David Halevy is a 19-year veteran

correspondent and a former member of Israel's special operations forces. He is also in the Israel Defense Forces reserves.

A number of articles by Livingstone and Halevy have appeared in SOF, the most recent being an account of how an attempt to rescue U.S. hostages in Lebanon was betrayed (see "Operation Betrayal," Oct. '89) and a report detailing how Israeli commandos assassinated Abu Jihad, the Palestine Liberation Organization's military operations chief (see "Defanging The Serpent," Dec. '88).

The current article is taken from Livingstone's forthcoming book, *The Cult of Counterterrorism*.



ABOVE: Interview with John Tetrake, pilot of hijacked TWA flight 847, ended abruptly when Shi'ite terrorist decided he had said enough. Scenes like this persuaded U.S. to start striking back. Photo: AP/Wide World

ABOVE LEFT: Lieutenant Colonel Oliver North testifies at the Iran-Contra hearings. Lost in the uproar over Iran-Contra is the key role North played in the 1985-86 U.S. anti-terrorism campaign. Photo: Sygma

LEFT: Coffin of Navy diver Robert Stethem arrives at Andrews Air Force Base 18 June 1985. Hijackers of TWA flight 847 shot him on day two of the hijacking. Photo: AP/Wide World

forged extremely close ties to the Israelis, whose tough stance on terrorism he greatly admired. The benefits of this relationship could be glimpsed during the TWA 847 hostage drama.

At 0910 hours on the morning of 14 June 1985, a TWA jetliner bound from Athens to Rome was hijacked by Shi'ite gunmen. The plane was forced to fly to Beirut and then on to Algiers. After being refueled, the plane returned to Beirut, then back again to Algiers, where U.S. Delta Force commandos were waiting. They had been given permission by the Algerians to land, but not to operate on Algerian soil. The U.S. Ambassador to Algeria and the White House had asked the Algerians for permission to let Delta "take the plane down," but it was never given. Ultimately, the plane flew to

Beirut for a third time.

On the second day of the crisis a young U.S. Navy diver, Robert Stethem, was murdered in cold blood by the terrorists. Although some passengers had been released in both Algiers and Beirut, the terrorists broke up the remaining 39 passengers and crew into smaller groups that were dispersed throughout Beirut to make any rescue attempt by the U.S. more difficult.

From the moment Washington was notified of the skyjacking, a little after 0400 on the first day, top administration anti-terrorism officials, including Oliver North, went into action. The Syrians and Iranians,

as well as Shi'ite Amal leader Nabih Berri, whose gunmen controlled the fate of most of the hostages, were quietly informed that the United States wanted a speedy resolution of the problem, and that if any harm befell the remaining captives, U.S. military action was sure to follow. President Reagan said publicly that the United States would continue to show restraint for the time being, but warned the terrorists and their state sponsors that U.S. restraint had its limits. To give added impetus to his words, U.S. military forces, including the aircraft carrier U.S.S. *Nimitz* and a U.S. Marine amphibious force, were massed in the Eastern



U.S. Navy diver Robert Stethem, 23, who was shot and killed by hijackers of TWA flight 847. Photo: AP/Wide World



Family album photo of Leon Klinghoffer. Wheelchair-bound Klinghoffer was shot by *Achille Lauro* hijackers and his body dumped into the sea after his name was drawn in an American passport 'lottery'. Photo: AP/Wide World



Mediterranean. In addition, elements of the U.S. Delta Force were deployed on Cyprus; an advance party had already infiltrated Beirut. Still other U.S. military assets were waiting in Israel for the word to move. The administration's resolve was further toughened when four U.S. Marines were gunned down in a cafe in San Salvador during the height of the hijacking drama.

An indication of the degree of detail that North sometimes became involved in was that during the TWA 847 hijacking he was overheard on the phone trying to get the flags lowered to half-mast for Robert Stethem. Similarly, after the four Marines were killed in El Salvador he took time from the hostage crisis to assist in making arrangements for the transport of the bodies back to the United States. North was never good at delegating responsibility, but the fact remains that he was for the most part a lone operator without immediate staff or resources; hence, there was no one to whom he could really delegate. To get things done he had to beg, borrow, cajole, inspire and intimidate those with the necessary resources, something at which he became very adept. He sometimes joked that his only tangible resources were White House stationery and the White House switchboard.

Finally, with the threat of U.S. military intervention looming over the region, negotiations secured the release of the 39 remaining hostages, but not before some very tense moments. Under the final arrangement that was reached, Israel released — in what was purported to be an unconnected action — more than 700 Shi'ite prisoners to pave the way for the freedom of the hostages from TWA 847. According to North, however, the agreement broke down late on 29 June when Hezbollah terrorists, holding the four Jewish passengers, refused to go along with the deal. The administration, however, was adamant: it wanted *all* of the hostages back or the agreement was off. North, who was already deeply involved in secret diplomacy with the Speaker of the Iranian Parliament, Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, said that he contacted Rafsanjani by means of a prear-

ABOVE: Shi'ite hijackers grabbed TWA flight 847 on 14 June 1985 and forced it to fly to Beirut. After killing Robert Stethem, a U.S. Navy diver who was on board, terrorists provided world media with abundance of photo ops. Photo: Sygma

ranged channel to elicit his help. North says that Rafsanjani personally intervened to secure the release of the Jewish hostages, thereby permitting the deal to go forward. Ultimately, all of the hostages were transported to Damascus in a Red Cross convoy.

During the TWA hijacking crisis the United States and Israel reached a new level of anti-terrorist cooperation. In order to facilitate this cooperation, a secret channel of communication was established between the two nations, and Oliver North was designated as the U.S. pointman. The decision to name North as the American liaison, ratified by top Pentagon and intelligence officials, was known to only a very small group at the National Security Council (NSC). Key players on the U.S. side were Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Policy Richard Armitage, Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman John Vessey, CIA Director Bill Casey and his deputy Robert Gates, and a handful of others. The Israelis most actively involved were Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin, the Prime Minister's counterterrorism adviser Amiram Nir, former Mossad official David Kimche, Israeli Chief of Staff Lieutenant General Moshe Levy, military intelligence chief Major General Ehud Barak, and Israel's chief defense attache in Washington, Major General Uri Simhoni. Together, the NSC staff and their Israeli counterparts examined the military and other options for securing the release of the TWA passengers, and coordinated all actions that were taken.

It was during the TWA 847 hijacking that the role of the Iranians as leading sponsors of Middle East terrorism became firmly established to everyone's satisfaction. Earlier in the year, CIA Director Casey had said

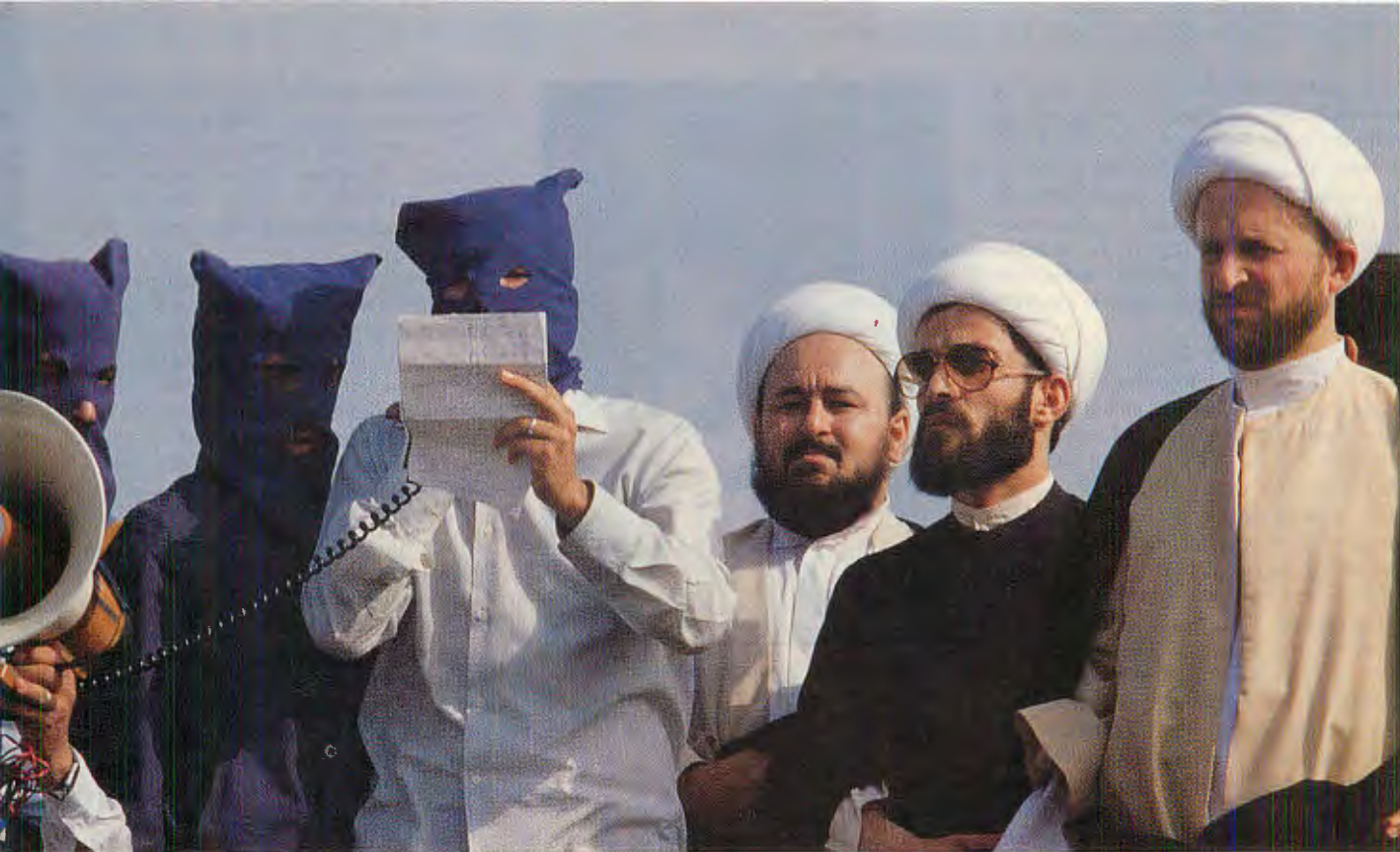
that "more blood has been shed by Iranian-sponsored terrorists than any other," but there were still those in the U.S. government who maintained that the connection was tenuous and difficult, if not impossible, to prove. No more. If there had been any doubts about the 1983 bombings in Beirut and the 1984 aircraft hijacking, Western intelligence firmly established Iran's links to the TWA 847 hijacking. In retrospect, it appears that Nabih Berri's Amal, acting on orders from Tehran, carried out the initial hijacking and then turned it over to the "more radical" Hezbollah. Subsequently, Berri stepped back into the picture at the end to play peacemaker and resolve the crisis, although certain recalcitrant elements in Hezbollah nearly scuttled the whole plan.

The Hunt for Immad Mughniye

North's first major operation was an effort to apprehend Immad Mughniye, the operational chief of the radical Hezbollah Shi'ite terrorist organization in Lebanon.



Released TWA flight 847 hostage Jimmy Dell Palmer at press conference with Nabih Berri, leader of the Shi'ite Amal militia. Berri's people are thought to have staged the hijack, then turned the aircraft over to the more radical Hezbollah gunmen — which allowed Berri to pose as a moderate and help negotiate an end to the incident. Photo: Sygma



Hijackers of TWA flight 847 held a press conference to present their demands. Although portrayed as fanatics, there was nothing unsophisticated about Hezbollah's use of the media. Photo: Sygma

Mughniye is perhaps one of the most cunning and ruthless terrorists in the world today and was responsible for the 1983 bombing of the U.S. embassy in West Beirut that wiped out most of the CIA station in Lebanon. He was also behind the bombing of the U.S. Marine barracks, as well as the attack on the French peacekeeping force. Another Mughniye operation nearly wiped out Israel's counterterrorist network in southern Lebanon, and it is generally believed that he orchestrated the 16 March 1984, kidnapping of the new CIA chief of station in Lebanon, William Buckley, who later died after prolonged torture by his captors, as well as numerous other kidnappings.

It is doubtful that Buckley ever should have been sent to the Middle East again. His "cover" had been blown in at least two countries, one of which was Syria; therefore, it must be assumed that his captors knew exactly who he was. Buckley was reportedly one of approximately eight candidates for the position of Beirut station chief, and he was reluctant to go. But he confided to friends that it was likely he would be selected for Beirut because, unlike the other candidates, he was not married and did not have a family, although he did have a close girlfriend.

By 1985, Mughniye, along with Abu Nidal, was perhaps the most wanted terrorist in the world. Within the Reagan administration, Mughniye's capture or murder was almost an obsession. CIA Director Casey wanted him because of the loss of the CIA

station and the abduction of Buckley, a personal friend. Shultz and McFarlane were both ex-Marines, and had been traumatized by the bombing of the Marine headquarters; North was an active-duty Marine who had vowed to do everything in his power to bring Mughniye to justice and thereby avenge the 241 American servicemen who had perished in the attack at the Beirut airport. "Ollie," said a close friend and colleague at the NSC, "took an oath to hunt down and bring to trial the Shi'ite terrorist who was responsible for the bombing of the Marine headquarters."

A remarkable set of events was almost to fulfill North's wish. While Mughniye was in France, Hezbollah had kidnapped four Russian diplomats from the Soviet embassy in West Beirut. When their demands were not met, the Hezbollah terrorists executed

one of the diplomats. Unlike the United States, the Soviets did not procrastinate or worry about legalisms; instead, they assigned their proxies, the Druze Progressive Socialist Party, under the leadership of the warlord Walid Jumblatt, to get their diplomats back and to teach Hezbollah a lesson.

The Druze fighters did not waste any time. They quickly picked up one of Mughniye's deputies, since Mughniye was abroad, and brought him to the basement of the Soviet embassy in West Beirut. They permitted him to make several phone calls — but only after dispatching a special courier to his confederates with some of his fingers to demonstrate their seriousness. In view of the emergency, Mughniye was contacted in France by his headquarters in Beirut. At the time, Mughniye was on the



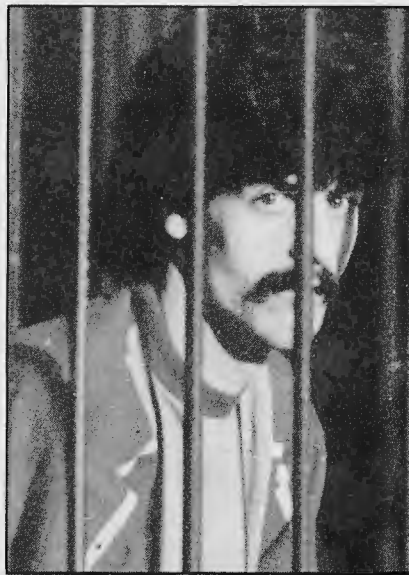
For once we bag the bums. EgyptAir jet was supposed to carry *Achille Lauro* terrorists to safety. North cooked up

operation in which F-14 Tomcats from U.S.S. *Saratoga* forced it to land at U.S. base at Sigonella on Sicily. Photo: Sygma

south coast of France, traveling under an assumed name and using a false passport. In response to the urgent message, Mughniye ordered the release of the three surviving Soviet diplomats and the return of the body of their murdered colleague in order to secure the freedom of his deputy. The Israelis, however, were monitoring the communications, and were therefore able to pinpoint Mughniye's location.

Upon learning of Mughniye's whereabouts, North went into action at once. He requested that the Israelis maintain close surveillance of Mughniye and not let him slip away. At the same time, he informed the CIA and his superiors at the NSC of the exciting development, and a task force composed of CIA operators and DoD special operations representatives was set up to monitor developments. In order to secure French cooperation, North told friends that he traveled to France to hammer out the necessary details. While the French initially promised full cooperation and assumed the task of maintaining prime surveillance of Mughniye, the United States could not get French assurances that Mughniye would be extradited once he was apprehended. Indeed, it appeared that the French wanted to try him themselves since, after all, Mughniye had also been responsible for an attack on French forces in Lebanon. The French position was strengthened by new intelligence that Mughniye had come to France not only for rest and relaxation, but also in order to plan a series of terrorist operations on French soil designed to win freedom for the notorious terrorist Georges Ibrahim Abdallah. Abdallah was implicated in the murders of U.S. Deputy Military Attache Charles Ray and Israeli diplomat Yacov Barsimantov, in reality chief of the Israeli Mossad in France.

As North worked to hammer out an agreement with the French, he got word from the Israelis, who had maintained their surveillance of the terrorist, that French



Ahmad Al Assadi on trial in Genoa — compliments of the U.S. Navy — for the Achille Lauro hijacking. Photo: AP/Wide World

police had arrested Mughniye, bundled him off to the airport and put him on the first flight to the Middle East. North was outraged, but there was nothing he could do. Later, the French claimed that they had saved the United States and Israel a major embarrassment, since the man was not really Mughniye, but the victim of mistaken identification.

The failure to apprehend Mughniye was North's first major disappointment in his long and unrelenting struggle against terrorism, and one that he would not soon forget. It also served to underscore the difficulties involved in securing allied cooperation in combating terrorism, at least until the Europeans could be convinced that cooperation was preferable to the unilateral use of military force by the United States. Thus, he began the process of seeking an appropriate

opportunity to strike a decisive military blow against terrorism, which would shake the Europeans out of their indifference and lethargy. In addition, the Mughniye failure reinforced his efforts to undertake extensive covert measures against terrorists and their state sponsors.

In retrospect, the fact that Mughniye, the murderer of so many of his fellow Marines, slipped through his fingers produced great frustration and resentment on North's part, and played a major role in his later willingness to consider any means, however unusual or outlandish, to deal with the problem of terrorism. As he saw it, U.S. policy with respect to international terrorism was not working, and, therefore, it was time to try something new. The worst that could happen was that it would not work either.

In many respects, North's ascension at the NSC represented the "Israelization" of U.S. anti-terrorism policy under the Reagan administration: the willingness to consider, if not use, any means available to combat terrorism. In this connection, North was a strong proponent of covert action against terrorists and their state sponsors — and of what he generally referred to as "special activities," that is, activities conducted in support of U.S. policy objectives abroad, without attribution, such as disinformation. Bogus stories were fed to the media about Muammar el Khadafi and various terrorist leaders, designed to humiliate them and undermine their authority. False rumors were planted claiming that certain terrorists were "agents of Israel or the United States," thus sowing suspicion within their own ranks. A phony assassination of a Khadafi foe in Cairo was orchestrated to embarrass the Libyan leader. Khadafi fell for the ruse; he publicly claimed credit for the attack. The CIA reportedly encouraged and supported the anti-Khadafi opposition group that launched the unsuccessful May 1984 attack on Azzizia Barracks, where Khadafi lived, near Tripoli.

There is no hard evidence, however, to support the claim that the United States attempted to assassinate Shi'ite religious leader Sheikh Mohammed Hussein Fadlallah, as satisfying as his death would have been to North, Casey, and others in the government. Fadlallah was the spiritual leader of Hezbollah and, according to journalist Amir Taheri, "the idol of the radicals" in the Lebanese Shi'ite movement. Fadlallah reportedly had been involved in the selection of targets and in planning the three vehicle-bomb attacks on the United States in Beirut, and he had personally blessed the young Shi'ite suicide bomber who drove the truckload of explosives into the Marine barracks at the Beirut airport at the start of the mission. Bob Woodward, however, relates in his book *Veil* that CIA Director Bill Casey had hatched a plot with Saudi Ambassador to the United States, Prince Bandar bin Sultan, to strike back at Fadlallah and on 8 March 1985, a car loaded with explosives detonated about 50 yards from Fadlallah's Beirut residence, killing



Egyptian police armed with Kalashnikovs guard the Achille Lauro at Port Said after F-14 Tomcats from the U.S.S. *Saratoga*

forced the EgyptAir jet carrying hijackers to safety to land at an American base on Sicily. Photo: AP/Wide World

approximately 80 people and injuring more than 200. Woodward maintains the Saudis were given operational control over the operation, and that they contracted with a former English SAS commando, who hired a number of Lebanese to carry out the actual attack. After the operation failed to kill Fadlallah it was decided to bribe him instead, says Woodward, after which "there were no more Fadlallah-supported terrorist attacks against Americans." There is no evidence to support Woodward's claim; however, a month after the assassination attempt on Fadlallah, Casey told a restricted audience that anti-American terrorist "attacks have not passed without significant response." He did not go into any detail.

During the mid-1980s, moreover, an effort was made to undermine the infrastructure and logistics apparatus of a number of terrorist organizations. Electronic fund transfers and travel arrangements disappeared, communications went astray, terrorist safe houses and other cover operations were disrupted or shut down, and defective weapons were sold to terrorist groups. In one instance, according to North, ultra-sensitive bomb detonators were sold to Hezbollah terrorists in Lebanon. As the terrorists were loading a bomb into a vehicle in the basement of a high-rise building, it detonated, bringing down the apartment house on top of them. It was not something that the United States could openly take credit for, said North, since civilians had died in the mishap, but the terrorists "got the message."

Mr. Ice and Mr. Wood

One example of the extraordinary lengths North and others in the administration were prepared to go to combat terrorism concerned an effort to trade three convicted Mexican drug dealers for the notorious Puerto Rican terrorist William Morales, also known as "Three Fingered Willie" in some police circles, since his features and hands had been maimed when a bomb he was putting together blew up in his face.



Body of Leon Klinghoffer, murdered *Achille Lauro* passenger, returns to U.S. Palestinian terrorists shot the wheelchair-bound Klinghoffer and threw his body into the sea after they drew his name at random in a "lottery" of American passengers' passports to see who would die. Photo: Sygma



Italian cruise ship *Achille Lauro* returning to Italy after hijacking. Thanks to North's efforts, the October 1985 hijack was a rare instance in which the perpetrators of a state-sponsored terrorist act were apprehended. Photo: Sygma

Morales, a fanatic FALN (*Fuerzas Armadas de Liberacion Nacional*/Armed Forces of National Liberation) terrorist, had been convicted of a series of deadly bombings in New York City during the 1970s and sentenced to 99 years in prison. Unfortunately, Morales had escaped from a prison hospital and had made his way to Mexico where, four years later, he was apprehended following a shootout 65 miles southeast of Mexico City. Two of Morales' female companions and a Mexican police officer were killed in the incident. It was believed that Morales intended to bomb a meeting of U.S. and Mexican parliamentarians scheduled to be held in the city of Puebla.

A U.S. extradition request was ignored by Mexican authorities, and instead Morales was tried and sentenced to a prison term in Mexico, consistent with Mexican law, which requires that Mexican prison sentences be served before any extradition requests are considered. Both the Cuban and Nicaraguan governments, however, began exerting enormous pressure on the Mexican government to release Morales, who they regarded not as a terrorist but as a hero. In view of the "porous" reputation of Mexican prisons, Reagan administration

officials, especially then Presidential Counselor Edwin Meese, were extremely worried that Morales would be permitted to escape, either by corrupt prison officials susceptible to bribes or by the Mexican government, which might just decide to look the other way.

Against this background, two men from Missouri with names that sounded too contrived to be real, Mr. Ice and Mr. Wood, came to Washington in 1984 to make a trade: one of the most notorious terrorists in the nation's history for three drug dealers — a mad dog for three scumbags.

Randall Wood and Cody Ice looked like a couple of Midwestern rubes: both were big men, overweight, dressed in light suits, brown shoes, and wide ties. But once they opened their mouths, any doubts about their competence vanished immediately. They were all business.

Wood is a prominent Springfield attorney who has represented a number of convicted drug dealers, and Ice is one of the largest bail bondsmen in the Midwest. They had come to Washington to propose that three Mexican drug dealers incarcerated at the federal correctional facility in Leavenworth, Kansas, be transferred back to Mexico under the provisions of an agreement between the United States and Mexico that allows nationals of each country to serve their time, for crimes committed in the other nation, in their native land. Originally de-

Continued on page 73

BLACKJACK'S WAR

Spike Team Alabama Vs. Army of North Vietnam

by Isaac Staats

Illustration by Ralph Butler

Command and Control: MACV/SOG, 5th SFGA.

Area of Operation: Laos; codename, Prairie Fire.

Mission: Primary, locate NVA regiment; secondary, general recon; alternate, cancel mission if opportunity to capture live NVA soldier arises.

Target Team: Spike Team (ST) Alabama.

Date: 5 October 1968.

Launch Site: Phu Bai, FOB #1, South Vietnam.

Insertion Aircraft: Vietnamese-piloted Sikorsky H-34 helicopters, codenamed Kingbees.

Lead Ship: Callsigns One-zero, team leader; One-two, American radio operator; Zero-one, Vietnamese team leader; Zero-two, team interpreter; and Zero-nine, Vietnamese M79 grenade launcher team member.

Second Ship: One-one, assistant U.S. team leader; and three remaining Vietnamese team members.

Third Ship: Back-up.

Assets on Site: Two A1E Skyraiders; one O-2 Covey, forward air controller; two UH-1B Huey gunships and F-4 Phantoms on call.

[For reasons that will soon be apparent, only the codename and nickname of two team members will be used in this story, as told to Isaac Staats by the third American team member, codenamed "Blackjack."]

AFTER pulling garbage details in Phu Bai for two months, ST Alabama was hastily thrown together on 3 October when an overweight Green Beret and Korean War veteran was suddenly appointed team leader because he was an E-7, while Blackjack, who had been on the team for more than two months, was only an E-4.

After a brief introduction, the new One-zero and Blackjack flew a visual recon over



"Blackjack" (right) with author at FOB No. 1 in Phu Bai, November 1968, shortly after action described in article. Photo: courtesy author

LOGGING SOG

Isaac Staats, a frequent contributor to *Soldier of Fortune* Magazine, served two tours with Special Forces in Vietnam (and Laos) and participated in many cross-border operations as a spike team member. Previous articles in SOF on this subject include "Never on Sunday" (December '87), "Shot out of Laos" (February '88), and "Spectres Over Laos" (May '88).

their target in a small observation aircraft. The One-zero and Blackjack flew in the back, while two Vietnamese piloted the single-engine plane. Having selected their primary and secondary LZs (landing zones), the plane turned to go home.

Suddenly the cabin was sprayed with blood, as a 12.7mm heavy machine gun bullet blasted the co-pilot's helmet into the ceiling. It ricocheted into Blackjack's lap—with part of the co-pilot's head still in the helmet.

The pilot flew at treetop level all the way back to Phu Bai, as Blackjack puked into the helmet. There were a fair share of jokes and stories in camp about Blackjack's helmet-puke-and-brain salad that night.

There was no laughing, however, when the Kingbees inserted ST Alabama on the primary LZ promptly at 0600 on 5 October. On the flight across Vietnam and deep into the Prairie Fire area of operations (AO), Blackjack remembered how the launch commander had said this mission would be a cakewalk. For some reason, the vision of guzzling a Recon Wreck flooded his mind.

The NVA flag planted on a knoll in the middle of the open field on their chosen LZ abruptly jarred him back to reality. This was Laos. A lot of spike teams had vanished or had been destroyed here.

This knoll was surrounded by jungle and on the west side had a 1,000-foot drop to the valley floor below. The second Kingbee drew ground fire. Covey gave the One-zero a choice, extract or continue. Blackjack argued for extraction. ST Alabama had been compromised. Why continue?

"No, I'm an American. No slant-eyed SOB is going to run me off!" the One-zero replied, and they landed.

Then the One-zero ordered the pointman to walk down a well-traveled trail into the jungle. Blackjack, the pointman, and Cowboy, a tall Vietnamese team member, objected strenuously but to no avail.

A short distance into the jungle, ST Alabama walked into a classic "L" ambush on



that trail. AK-47 rounds ripped into the pointman's chest and face. The fatal impact of those rounds made the canteen covers around his waist appear to keep his body suspended in the air. What had been a human body milliseconds ago was being chewed into an amorphous form which hit the ground with a sickening thud, as arterial blood spurted high into the air.

One-zero took three rounds in the left side of his head, blowing off the right side of his face.

Months on garbage detail didn't prepare ST Alabama for its sudden introduction into this NVA-occupied hell.

The One-one, who wasn't Special Forces trained but had volunteered for a tour of duty with SF from a regular Army unit, buried his face in the dirt and started praying. He didn't take command. Blackjack, a bearded veteran from the 173rd Airborne Brigade, did.

He and Cowboy formed the team into a circle and directed a barrage of M79 and CAR15 fire into the jungle surrounding them.

Then suddenly, startling silence.

Blackjack felt as though he was in his grave because ST Alabama was in a low spot with the ground rising 10 to 20 feet on either side of the team. During the interlude, both the NVA and ST Alabama tended to their wounded while the living slammed new magazines into their hot weapons. There was moaning and groaning, human suffering on both sides. Blackjack redistribri-

"Blackjack," then assistant team leader of ST Idaho, being inspected by General Stilwell in front of HQ in Da Nang before mission in April 1969. To right of "Blackjack" are Idaho's interpreter Nyugen Cong Heip, Vietnamese team leader Nyugen Van Sau, and Son the pointman. Behind Stilwell is author, then ST Idaho team leader. Photo: courtesy author

buted the weapons and ammo he pulled from his dead team members.

Blackjack told Covey he had two dead and two wounded; ST Alabama was surrounded and that he couldn't bring the dead men out.

Covey responded, "You're not a doctor or, for that fact, a medic. You can't determine who's dead or alive! Bring out all bodies for verification of death."

Their argument was drowned out when more than 100 NVA regulars opened fire on ST Alabama with AK-47s and SKS-launched rifle grenades. The NVA were two rows deep: the front row fired AK-47s, the second row fired the grenades. Another Vietnamese team member was wounded. ST Alabama had to get out of that hole or die in it.

The bold NVA told the team to *chu hoi* — surrender — speaking in French, English and Vietnamese. The One-one prayed. Blackjack told him: "This is no time to pray... do unto others before they do unto you."

The NVA continued to move, some

climbing into trees. Cowboy and Blackjack crawled 15 feet toward the NVA, close enough so Cowboy could hear the NVA commander tell his troops to prepare to charge ST Alabama's position. The NVA commander also told his troops on the long side of the "L" ambush not to fire. Blackjack quickly rigged a claymore mine in the direction of the charge.

The claymore split the charging NVA force in half. ST Alabama ran through the human carnage, firing CAR15s on full automatic and throwing M26 frag grenades, dragging the wounded. Miraculously, ST Alabama made it through the NVA enclave and ran back toward the LZ, leaving behind their dead.

Covey told Blackjack no extraction was possible because the choppers had to fly back to Phu Bai to refuel — a minimum of two hours.

Now, the NVA were running behind and alongside ST Alabama. Blackjack planted a claymore with a five-second time-delay fuse. The claymore again wreaked havoc on the hard-charging NVA.

As the smoke and body parts settled back to earth, ST Alabama split in half and again charged through the battered and torn ranks of the relentless NVA warriors, killing any standing enemy. "We counted at least 50 dead NVA there alone," Blackjack said.

Again, sudden silence. ST Alabama regrouped.

And, just as suddenly, a new wave of NVA

soldiers flooded toward the beleaguered team. On line, ST Alabama again charged through the weakest NVA flank, killing another large number of enemy soldiers.

Then, something hit Blackjack in the side of the head, knocking him to his knees. "I scrambled to get up when the grenade went off. The last thing I remember was being slammed into a tree face first and the CAR15 carrying handle digging into my chest.

"I couldn't breathe, I was drowning." Then "feet were kicking me, hands were slapping me all over. It was the team; they were beating me back to consciousness,

pouring water on my face. I tried to get up but my legs didn't work. From the knees down there were no fatigue pants, and I was surface bleeding. One of the guys started smearing gelatinized rice on my legs, arms and chest. My web gear and what was left of my fatigue jacket were lying shredded, bloody, on the ground. My CAR15 was bent where the barrel meets the receiver and the bolt couldn't be pulled back. One of the guys buried it."

By 0900 hours, word of ST Alabama's precarious position had spread through FOB #1 like wildfire. Requests were made for extra assets and Kingbees. When the S-3 asked for volunteers for a Brightlight — a

heavily armed spike team designed to extract downed pilots or injured STs, every recon man volunteered. Later in the morning, a resupply of ammo, grenades, claymores, M79 rounds, water, bandages and morphine were placed on a Kingbee and launched toward ST Alabama.

In Laos, Cowboy worked on Blackjack's legs. He told Blackjack the last wave of NVA had continued onto the LZ when they heard the Huey gunships arrive overhead. Throughout these tactical situations, the One-one panicked, cried and shouted skyward. Finally, the Vietnamese team members told Blackjack they were going to kill One-one if he didn't shut up.

Blackjack agreed, saying, "I'll pull the trigger on him."

Tearfully, One-one said, "God forgive you."

"You and your god have no place here!" Blackjack retorted.

Cowboy grabbed Blackjack by the throat with one hand and lifted a Catholic crucifix from his neck with the other and shoved it to his lips, whispering in Blackjack's ear: "It's the gods who have allowed us to get this far, round eyes!"

"Without a word, a look, a plan, acting on survival instinct, all of us except One-one scurried forward and dragged back bodies, placing them in a circle around us, stacking them high."



The sound of Kingbees approaching the area ended the religious debate as the team members carried the wounded toward the LZ. Blackjack told Covey that ST Alabama was in position for extraction.

"Roger, Blackjack. When the first chopper sets down send four. One must be a recognizable Straw Hat (American)."

Then a fastmover pilot told Blackjack to "key your handset for 10 seconds. Put your heads in the dirt, over."

Blackjack acknowledged his transmission and told his cohorts to duck.

As he looked into the sun, he observed "the slowest moving, full-flapped, Phantom (F-4) I had ever seen. His glide path ratio was critical." He saw the tree line across the LZ explode into sheets of white, yellow and orange flames, setting the jungle on fire. The ship banked sharply, standing his wing tip on the ground. The pilot cranked on the burners and dropped down into the valley below the team and began a vertical climb.

NVA small arms opened up on all sides of the valley. He took numerous hits on his armor plated bottom. Among those shooting at the F-4 were several NVA troops about 20 feet from ST Alabama's perimeter. As the napalm torched the jungle dozens of NVA soldiers scurried into the open field to escape the instant inferno which had engulfed them.

Firing on single shot, ST Alabama "picked off each of them as they came out of the burning jungle." The Phantoms returned with two cannon-and-minigun runs along the team's perimeter. Before the dust settled, the Vietnamese team leader and Cowboy crawled out and recovered several AK-47s and precious ammunition, which was getting desperately low.

Two Kingbees came chugging up the valley toward ST Alabama. When Blackjack popped a green smoke as a marker, the NVA popped identical smoke, confusing the pilots, with devastating results.



When the first Kingbee touched down it took a direct hit from a rocket on the flight deck which toppled it on its side, with each subsequent blade smashing into the ground, narrowly missing the approaching ST Alabama team members.

Blackjack, Cowboy and another team member charged the rocket position, instantly killing three NVA before a hail of NVA fire drove them back to the team perimeter. Meanwhile, the second H-34 hit an outcropping of rock, quickly exploding and falling 1,000 feet into the valley below. So much for ST Alabama's resupply ship.

Meanwhile, the second H-34 hit an outcropping of rock, quickly exploding and falling 1,000 feet into the valley below.

Covey said, "Nice going, Blackjack!" "Fuck you, Covey," was the reply.

Cowboy told the One-one to pray for everyone except Blackjack because "he's on the devil's side." Blackjack broke into laughter as he assessed ST Alabama's predicament: ammo was critically low; the blood trails looked like Pacific Northwest slug slime after an encounter with Slug Bait; Phantoms expended, returning home. Covey was belligerent.

"My nerves were bullshit," Blackjack recalled. "Training and man's basic survival instinct had completely taken over."

Then the NVA bugles sounded. Waves of NVA troops carrying SKSs with fixed bayonets advanced on ST Alabama. When they were 15 feet away, ST Alabama opened fire. The semi-automatic SKSs were no match for the fully automatic firepower of the Spike Team. After the first burst of full auto, the team went to single shot — "like another turkey shoot."

"Without a word, a look, a plan, acting on survival instinct, all of us except One-one scurried forward and dragged back bodies, placing them in a circle around us, stacking them high."

Covey told Blackjack more gunships and five Jolly Green Giants, the heavily armored CH-53s, were en route. "Blackjack, Covey. What you're up against is the regiment you were sent to find, over."

"Is that all, only 3,000 of the bastards? Well, I think we made a dent in 'em. Who's winning?" Blackjack queried. "They are," Covey replied.

Then, Blackjack saw a sight he'll take to the grave with him: a front line of NVA troops were reloading their AK-47s, while several NVA soldiers behind them were swinging thongs made of leather and cloth which held three to five hand grenades and with a jerk of their collective thongs, the NVA hurlers launched more than two dozen grenades at ST Alabama.

"The sky was full of grenades. We hugged the ground. Thank God, they

weren't U.S. grenades. They hit the ground and threw dirt, smoke and dust all over the place. We looked up just as the AKs started again and behind them the grenades were whirling overhead like the blades of human helicopters. When the AKs stopped the grenades whirled. We fired. The grenades were released. We caught some grenades; threw them back!" ST Alabama was caught in a deadly version of the kid game "pop goes the weasel."

The AKs roared. Alabama ducked. The grenades were launched. Alabama rocked. Catch, throw, duck, rock. Catch, throw, duck, rock!!

The NVA advanced. Two grenades severed the antenna on the PRC-25. Blackjack quickly rigged an impromptu antenna from wire.

Cowboy took two Vietnamese members out of ST Alabama's cadaver-walled perimeter. Covey made a pass firing a sub-machine gun from the cockpit, which hit one team member.

At the last moment, when the NVA were merely feet away from the stack of their dead comrades, the Judge and the Executioner — the Hueys — roared in with a mini-gun blast followed with rockets which decimated the NVA line. "The Judge saved our bacon," Blackjack said.

Charlie was not whipped yet. New assault lines of NVA troops formed. First the AKs, second the Davids. Before they opened fire on ST Alabama, the Executioner arrived, taking the NVA head on. With both door-gunners blazing away with their M60s, he landed in front of the NVA and skipped several 2.75mm rockets off the ground into the NVA. Before the bleeding, startled NVA could respond, the pilot lifted over the tree line and ducked down into the canyon.

And before ST Alabama could celebrate, the NVA charged again. Three more dead NVA were added to the cadaver wall.

Again, silence. Sudden silence. One-one continued to pray. Blackjack now patched up a bleeding Cowboy, giving him morphine before bandaging a wound on his right side from an AK round.

"Where's John Wayne when you need him?" Cowboy asked.

As ST Alabama laughed, an NVA troop said: "Chu Hoi, do ma!" (Give up, mother fuckers!) Another NVA told *Blackjack to Chu Hoi*. Blackjack flipped him the bird as a sniper shot the tail gunner in the crotch, hitting an artery.

Seconds later, a Skyraider, flown by a pilot with the codename Snoopy, roared in from the left, brushing the treetops, full flaps, working his throttle, flying sideways... click, click... napalm... the Skyraider appeared to be falling, but actually slipped down into the valley to escape enemy fire.

His wingman appeared, and as he flew over "we could hear the nuts and bolts and God knows what, creaking, groaning as he salvaged the rockets. They pissed off the NVA."

Continued on page 80

ROLLING BACK PRICES TO 1982 AND BEYOND

MOUNTAIN MEN

Continued from page 47

And traders sleep with their wares.

Likewise, rendezvous throughout the country vary depending on the area. The Ft. Bridger Rendezvous in Wyoming is open to the public and attracts some 35,000 people. The American Mountain Man (AMM) National Rendezvous is a members-only event where "nothing is allowed in that didn't exist before 1840 in the Rocky Mountains," says AMM Larry Mayes. The NMLRA Eastern rendezvous are less primitive and more oriented to shooting matches and classes on beadwork and flint knapping.

"There's a lot more regulations because of limited space," says Steell Fuller, who is running for boosway of the National Eastern in 1991 on a proposed site near Rochester, New York.

"We have access to figures for how many people come, how many gallons of water they use, how many cords of wood, how many sheets of toilet paper: its all on computer," he says.

"People come from New York and New Jersey," explains his wife Cracker, "and they've got to have seasoned oak cut to fireplace size. They wouldn't know what to do if you showed them a forest and told them to collect firewood."

The fascination for rendezvous extends to Europe, according Jochen Lahmann, or "Flint," boosway of the large Indian Council rendezvous near Cologne, West Germany. The Battle of the Little Big Horn is re-enacted worldwide, as are the battles of America's Civil War. While gun laws prevent shooting matches at the German rendezvous, Flint says that standards of authenticity are extremely strict.

"We have Indians, soldiers, cowboys, Mexicans, and buckskinners," he says. "And in the German way, they are very, very exacting in their costume. If it isn't right, they get it right or they don't come back again."

A controversy exists about how historically pure the National Western should be. Some want it more primitive, others want more emphasis on history and less on shooters. A new organization, the National Buckskinner Association, will hold its first rendezvous in 1990. Founded in 1989 by Tim and Barbara Pray of Thornton, Colorado, NAB wil emphasize purity, and go light on shooting competitions.

Other informal groups may simply set a time and place for a pre-1840 woodsie.

"George and I have pretty well decided that walk-in, ride-in rendezvous are the way to eliminate the snivelers," says Oak Smith.

"You're going to start seeing invite-olys," adds George Jackson, "people choos-ing folks that'll come to their type of rendezvous whether they want a real wild hu'-rah or some good people with nice outfits."

But one element of the National Western that can't be tamed is the environment. The site, which is traditionally located in the

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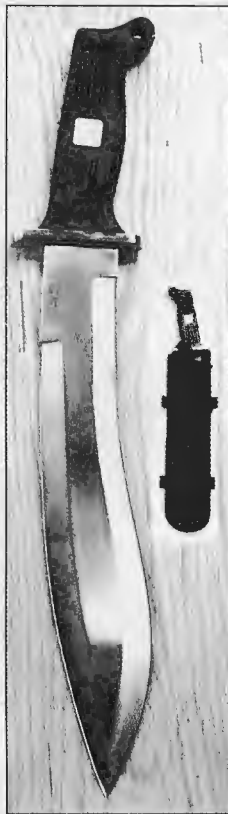
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Rockies, is primitive except for 17,000 gallons of drinking water, a horse-drawn ice wagon, and six-hole hooters. In July 1990, it will be held on an original rendezvous site in Pinedale, Wyoming.

"The National Western is probably the last of the Wild West," says Oak Smith. "Back East, you set your trash out, they come and pick it up. You set your water containers out, they fill 'em for you. They bring wood to your door. You can drive right up to them. People's expectations are getting a little hard to fulfill in spots like this. The road was our main complaint."

The Wyman site is an hour-and-a-half from civilization, mostly over gravel roads. The last three miles are a one-lane rut with rocks the size of cannonballs thumping the car.

"You'd think these people are very independent-minded or they wouldn't be here," says George. "But a lot of them never saw a mountain before. They get real nervous when they can't see lights at night."

"People have told us, 'It's not fair you have it way up high like this,'" says Oak. "That's an odd comment when you consider that they came here for the experience. If you remember, Peg Leg Smith had to chop his own leg off because of an arrow that got infected. You'd think people would take heart from that and figure that the car overheating is a heck of a lot less hassle."

On a moonless night near the end of the National Western, we're asked to supper for the third evening by people we've only just met. Knowing the way of the mountain man, we bring our own plates. Rendezvous-

ers are generous with their food, but an extra fork or dish is hard to come by.

"Nobody goes hungry," says Jack Cardinel, dipping into an iron pot and piling our plates with elk meat, venison and a hunk of moose shot in Alaska by Van Bethancourt.

It's easy to believe that the year is 1830 and that these men are free trappers roaming the Rockies. The sun has set, and hundreds of cookfires ward off the darkness. To the west, an orange halo simmers on the horizon from a forest fire burning near Dinosaur National Park. Overhead, the constellations in the summer sky are pretty much the same as they were 150 years ago.

"Do you think civilization still exists out there?" asks Old Bill of no one in particular.

Someone asks if anyone brought homemade applejack or raisinjack. No one has and Jack throws a handful of grounds into a coffee pot. Black powder rifles become the topic, and Van talks about a hunting trip to the Arctic Circle where he killed a musk ox with one shot of a flintlock muzzle loader.

"It was 30 degrees below, and I didn't know if a flintlock would shoot," he says. "Yet that's the kind of thing mountain men knew from experience."

Getting a taste of what the mountain man experienced is one of the main reasons modern buckskinners come to rendezvous.

"It's a secret desire to live without cars, telephones, airplanes," says Old Bill. "People are trapped in cities, and most of them don't like it. They want to leave, but they don't want to leave money. So they spend three days at rendezvous and live like

they'd like to."

For Gottfried Berger, the NMLRA representative from Austria, it's a chance to see American history as it was made.

"Many of your ancestors came from Germany and Austria," he says, "especially the riflemakers. I want to see what are doing the descendants."

For Oak Smith, rendezvous means camaraderie. "Like a fraternity," he says. "You form bonds with people you'd never meet otherwise," agrees Slowhand.

"Romance," says George Jackson. "That's what it is. The era of the mountain man was the most romantic time in American history. Bar none. Even in their time, they was the most elite, the most daring. People back east, they thought, God, it was romantic going out where there was no law, no white women, no God west of the Missouri River. Total freedom."

The National Western has a certain uniqueness. Coming to the Rockies, people say they feel close to the source.

"This area is where it happened," says John Arrasmith, "where it was historical fact."

As the night air turns chill, the buckskinners gather 'round the boogie fires. They hunch their shoulders against the cold, and play banjos and guitars as they sing bawdy, then tender, ballads. Jack Cardinel pours up the steaming coffee, and tells a story about the Indian medicine wheel, about the colors that represent the seasons of life.

"When you're young, you're like the mouse," he says, "too short to see anything but the green grass. You get older and big-



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ger, and finally, when you're in the winter of your years, you're an eagle. In the past, a man 45 was an ancient warrior."

Looking out from under the brim of his river otter hat, Van Bethancourt expresses a thought held by many modern mountain men. "Sometimes I think I was born 150 years too late," he says. ✕

EL SALVADOR

Continued from page 57

The guerrillas use several refugee camps, some within the borders of El Salvador, internationally run and off-limits to the army, for rest, recuperation and recruitment. They have strongholds in the northern departments (similar to states) of Chalatenango and Morazan, and east-central Usulután. By some estimates they have about 50,000 supporters among local inhabitants and in the capital. They have a headquarters in Managua and a news service, SALPRESS, in Mexico City. Washington says their arms and supplies come from several ComBloc countries channeled through Cuba and Nicaragua.

An American analysis obtained from the embassy of both sides' combat record so far this year shows that the guerrillas' performance is declining and the army's improving. In the first half of the year FMLN dead were at double the rate of the previous two years. If this rate continues they will suffer some 2,000 killed this year. By the same formula the army would lose 680 dead compared to 600 in 1987 and 1988.

The guerrillas launched an all-out campaign to upset the March national elections. It included attacks on army and police, bombing military members' homes, car-bombs in public places, power blackouts by sabotage, stopping all road traffic and declaring that "all vehicles moving will be blown up or burned." The campaign reached its peak on election weekend with more than 50 attacks in three days. The nationwide spread of incidents made headlines but the guerrillas lost 100 dead, one of the highest three-day tolls of the war. Moreover, their long-time political allies (see sidebar) formed for the elections into the Democratic Convergence Party, an amalgam of Christian socialists, social democrats and others managed to capture only 3.8 percent of the vote. Similarly, their announced "April-May Offensive" to make the country ungovernable came to nothing.

The analysis says the FMLN has escalated nuisance attacks and sabotage to disguise its failing military capacity. In 1988 attacks on and ambushes of security forces declined 12 percent and 14 percent, respectively, from 1987. Nuisance hits and sabotage rose 28 percent and 50 percent.

The guerrillas, battle hardened, skillful and dedicated, are still capable of massing for a major attack, but its cost to them in casualties and supplies would be far higher proportionately than in the past. However, FMLN comandante Ramon Torres, operat-

ing in the mountains of Cabanas, 60 miles north-east of the capital, told foreign newsmen on 29 July, "All our troops are now trained in anti-aircraft combat and the phase of the war when we were afraid of gunships is over. Now we can fight by day as well as by night." He said the most effective weapon against helicopters was the Dragunov 7.62mm sniper rifle. But there were also G3s and M60 machine guns. Whatever the other implications of this, two facts stand out: 1) The FMLN still has no ground-to-air missiles; and 2) They can still put on a clandestine press conference in their base areas. Their radio station regularly claims up to 400 dead and wounded a month and a gunship shot down or damaged.

The army, in the same half year, increased its offensive capacity. It mounted search and destroy operations such the 45-day Atlacatl campaign in Chalatenango, Morazan, west Usulután and on the slopes of the Guazapa Volcano. The guerrillas lost 200 dead, the army 55. It stepped up intelligence gathering and aggressive preemptive patrolling. Small units now range forward for days with strict night discipline — no cooking, no smoking, no lights. This has led to a kill ratio of three to one in favor of the army; weapon losses are about the same.

As for defense, the army was once weak in maintaining 'round-the-clock aggressive patrols. The low point of this was at the end of 1983 and in early 1984 when the 4th Brigade's base at El Paraiso in Chalatenan-

go was caught with one of its two battalions away guarding a dam and 100 men at a local dance. More than 100 of the remaining 250 troops were killed in a mortar barrage, followed up by a guerrilla attack. Forty miles away, on New Year's Eve, a national guard garrison defending the 1,600-foot Cuscatlan suspension bridge was celebrating when the guerrillas routed them and demolished the main span.

The 4th Brigade has since been attacked three more times. In contrast to the destruction of 1984 each additional attack has had less effect. The last attack on the 4th Brigade, earlier this year, took place just inside their perimeter. This pattern has been repeated at other bases and detachments. The attackers have usually been stopped at forward defense positions and then counterattacked. The rule is to be on 24-hour watch and conduct immediate reaction operations. Sergeant Campo Melendez, with 11 years of service, says, "I've had nine years fighting in most of the conflict zones and I'm proud of the commandos and red berets. So are the muchachos, the boys. We'll keep going."

How long he, and the country, will have to keep going is a question no one can answer. American military and embassy observers in El Salvador say that indications of a more flexible, aggressive and efficient army and a diminished guerrilla force means that success or failure of the new government's economic and social mea-

asures will determine how long the war will go on. The government needs to undercut the FMLN's claim that it is fighting for the people's rights if it wants to win their "hearts and minds."

The insurgents are still capable of inflicting damage and given the difficulty of eradicating small cells of guerrilla terrorists in the cities, it will be a tough fight. Some ranking officers have also let it be known that they consider providing opportunity for the average Salvadoran as important as military operations in bringing the war to an end. In short, jobs, housing, and opportunity for Salvadorans must improve in tandem with the fighting machine to finally bring the civil war to a successful conclusion. ✕

COMBAT WEAPONCRAFT

Continued from page 18

ward only when their partners are providing covering fire. A magazine that runs dry unexpectedly can be fatal (even though we're taught to count the number of rounds we fire, the heat of battle often overrides everything but the "shoot-and-move" instinct). Loading a couple of tracers so they are fired three or four shots before the last bullets in the magazine will alert both

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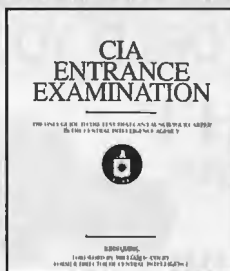
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the shooter and his partner that cover should be sought for a mag change.

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CASULL'S CANNON

Continued from page 29

similar to that of the 315-grain bullets. There was some jacket fragmentation, but both jackets peeled back to provide consistent expansion to only about .55 caliber with 90 percent of the bullet remaining intact. Standard deviation of all of the Game Grabbers ammunition was 28 fps.

A 260-grain JHP with a hard core was also provided, but we could not chamber this ammunition in our test revolver as the case rims appeared to be several thousandths of an inch too thick.

While the ferocious-looking teeth seem to serve no useful function in this caliber,

the 260-grain soft core double jacket Game Grabbers provide adequate penetration for hunting most thin-skinned game animals, albeit with only moderate expansion.

Freedom Arms' 240-grain JHP bullets were at one time provided with two factory loadings. Standard velocity ammunition, driven by 35 grains of H110, approached 1,700 fps through our 3/4-inch barrel. At this speed expansion was to approximately .65 caliber with considerable fragmentation, as only 60 percent of the original bullet weight was retained. Penetration was almost 16 inches in soft tissue, and this will suffice for animals with humanoid anatomies. The fragments were of large size and radiated outward a considerable distance from the wound track. It can be expected that these multiple fragments will perforate and weaken tissue. Tissue between two perforations will often be completely detached when subsequently subjected to the sudden stretch of temporary cavitation. Weakened tissue may be split by stretch that would otherwise be absorbed by the tissue's elasticity.

Freedom Arms' "medium velocity" 240-grain JHP ammunition, pushed by 17 to 18 grains of HS7, averaged about 1,150 fps with a standard deviation of only 12 fps. When dropped to this velocity, the projectile retains 96 percent of its original weight and expands to about .75 caliber. Yet, penetration drops only slightly, to about 15½ inches. Overall, that's superb performance with only moderate recoil. Unfortu-

nately, future medium velocity factory ammunition will be loaded with a less expensive bullet of, at this time, unknown effectiveness.

Bullet construction is an equally important parameter in determining the projectile's expansion characteristics. The cavity in the Freedom Arms' 240-grain JHP is twice as deep as that of the Game Grabbers. This undoubtedly explains the absence of significant expansion in either of the two Game Grabbers bullets, both of which travel faster (by almost 200 fps) than the medium velocity Freedom Arms' 240-grain JHP.

Freedom Arms' JFP bullets are designed for deep penetration. They perform their task admirably. Averaging almost 1,750 fps, with a standard deviation of only 15 fps, the 260-grain JFP bullet will penetrate up to 49 inches of soft tissue. In so doing, the hard alloy tip is driven rearward into the jacket with some small amount of expansion up to .47 caliber. Only seven percent of the bullet is lost to small fragments. This load produces considerable muzzle flash. The 300-grain JFP bullet, which averaged 1,535 fps with a standard deviation of 14 fps, will perform in a similar manner. With these bullets, the .454 Casull revolver is capable of dropping any vertebrate on planet Earth, providing the shooter places his shots correctly.

Given that the .454 Casull revolver and its factory ammunition are of magnificent quality, there are still several important variables in its accuracy equation. The

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shooter's experience and tolerance to recoil must certainly be considered. Shorter barrels of course magnify aiming errors, so most will do better with the 7½- and 10-inch tubes. With a handgun scope, some have reported 1-inch groups at 100 yards. That's one MOA performance and few hunting rifles can match this. You can expect three to four MOA with iron sights, if you're up to the revolver's capability. To put this into its proper perspective, remember that most of the 50 million Kalashnikov rifles manufactured are capable of no better than six MOA.

Few would choose the .454 Casull for self-defense. Its more realistic applications are obviously hunting and metallic silhouette competition. Nevertheless, out in the field in the dark of the night when Alaskan Brownies and other goblins prowl around the campsite, it's a comforting and convenient sidearm, especially so in the "packing pistol" 4¾-inch barrel length. It will subdue evil creatures with greater effectiveness than any other handgun I have ever brought up into the Weaver position.

There are any number of ways to tote the .454 Casull, but the most versatile I have seen is the Kodiak hunting holster designed by Bruce Nelson (Dept. SOF, PO Box 8691 CRB, Tucson, AZ 85738 phone: 602-825-9047 - catalog \$3). This custom leather rig can be worn in the shoulder position, either over or under a coat, and on a belt up to 2 inches wide in both strong side and cross-draw positions. The holster is completely

leather-lined and is provided with a compact flap to protect the sights and hammer. The shoulder harness is foam padded in the shoulder area. The harness can be adjusted to distribute the weight between the belt and shoulder if both carry systems are employed together for added security. The Kodiak can be quickly and easily shifted from one carry position to another as weather and terrain dictate.

In addition to their revolver and ammunition, Freedom Arms offers cases, bullets, reloading dies, bullet moulds, holsters, scope mounts, scopes, express and competition sights, front sight blades in assorted heights, sling swivels, MAG-NA-PORting (to compensate for muzzle climb) and numerous other options and accessories.

Those attracted to ultimate objects will find much satisfaction in the .454 Casull revolver. The world's most powerful production series handgun also happens to be a superbly crafted piece of machinery. ❧

OLLIE NORTH

Continued from page 63

signed as a way of ensuring that Americans would not have to suffer the depredations of Mexican prisons, the three Mexican drug dealers knew that, in contrast to the "hard time" they were serving at Leavenworth, their money would buy them a relatively

luxurious existence in a corrupt Mexican prison. Moreover, they had every reason to believe that they could bribe their way to freedom at some point down the road.

The Mexican drug dealers were aware that the United States was unlikely to send them back to Mexico unless there was someone in a Mexican prison who the Justice Department wanted even more than them. It did not take long to find out about the intense U.S. interest in Morales, and they soon hit upon a plan to structure an exchange between the two countries: themselves for Morales. To ensure that Morales did not escape in the meantime, they hired extra guards for his prison cell and paid off the warden. Agents for the drug dealers reportedly also bribed a number of high Mexican government officials, not only to prevent Morales from being extradited to the United States or expelled to Cuba or Nicaragua prior to an agreement being struck, but so that when the time came the officials would secretly hand Morales over to the United States and accept the drug dealers in return. It was proposed that the exchange of Morales for the drug dealers occur at night on the Rio Grande. The Mexican authorities were even prepared to see that Morales did not make it across the river alive, if that was more convenient for the United States. In other words, he could "down" crossing the Rio Grande.

Ice and Wood, as representatives for the imprisoned Mexican drug dealers, made ev-



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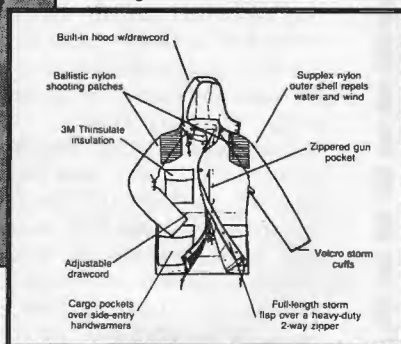
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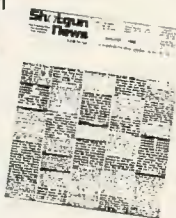
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ery effort to reach an agreement with U.S. authorities. They met with North on at least two occasions, and received encouragement in their efforts. Senator Strom Thurmond, then chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, and Meese also reportedly favored an exchange. Despite the desire to see Morales back in U.S. custody, however, the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) understandably opposed the exchange, since DEA agents had risked life and limb to bring the Mexican drug dealers to justice and felt it would set a bad precedent. In the end, it was impossible to reach a consensus within the U.S. government regarding the proposed exchange. Today the three drug dealers remain in U.S. custody while Morales was last reportedly living in Cuba, having been freed by Mexico, as North and Meese feared.

We Bag the Bums

On 19 June 1985, CIA Director Casey told a closed-door session of the Senate Intelligence Committee that "the United States is at war" with international terrorism and "the TWA hijacking is just the beginning." His words soon proved to be prophetic. While North had little room to operate during the TWA 847 crisis, perhaps his finest hour would come less than four months later in the wake of the seajacking of the Italian cruise ship *Achille Lauro*. On 7 October 1985, Palestinian terrorists, members of the radical splinter faction known as the Palestine Liberation Front (PLF), seized control of the ship and its 507 passengers and crew, including a number of Americans, off the coast of Egypt. Fortunately, many of the passengers had disembarked on a side trip to see the Pyramids.

The four pirates were dark, sullen young men whose behavior and appearance were in stark contrast to the rest of the passengers, mostly middle-aged and elderly tourists.

At 0845 hours on the morning of 7 October, the seajackers burst into the ship's dining room with weapons blazing, wounding two passengers. Once in control of the ship, they demanded the release of 50 Palestinians being held in Israel. When negotiations began to falter the following day, the terrorists brutally murdered wheelchair-bound Leon Klinghoffer of New York, dumping his body over the side of the ship. Reportedly, they had shuffled the passports of the Americans to see who would die, and Klinghoffer's had come up on top.

From the outset, the Reagan administration, its patience already worn thin by the TWA 847 incident, began planning the possible rescue of the ship in the event that the situation began to deteriorate precipitously. The Navy SEALs — commando frogmen capable of operating in water, in the air, and on land — were chosen for the mission. Perhaps the finest special-operations unit in the U.S. military inventory, SEALs undergo two years of basic training before they are entitled to wear the "Budweiser" flash on their uniforms. SEAL units operate under the command of the various theater commanders-in-chief,

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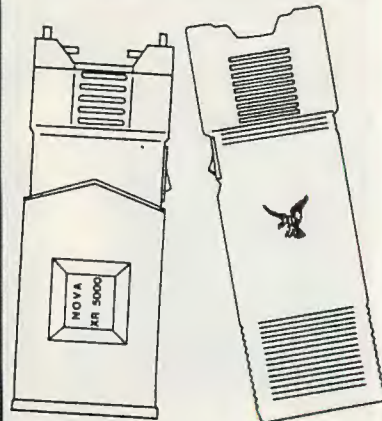
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with the exception of SEAL Team 6, which is attached to the Joint Special Operations Command. The SEALs are probably the U.S. combat unit most frequently involved in deep penetration operations on unfriendly territory.

One senior U.S. Defense Department official recalls meeting with members of SEAL Team 6 at Fort Bragg one day. "They looked like a band of pirates. One guy was wearing a loud sport coat and others were dressed in jeans. None of them stood up when we entered the room and they would only speak if spoken to, although their answers were very direct and forthright when asked a question." In order for them to blend in with the local population anywhere in the world, some members of the SEAL unit have long scraggly hair and beards, and more than one sports an earring or two. For those who remember "high and tight" military haircuts, some SEALs appear downright unmilitary. But there is nothing unmilitary about their combat skills, which are honed to perfection.

Thirty hours after the seizure of the *Achille Lauro*, U.S. anti-terrorist forces arrived at the British Royal Air Force Base at Akrotiri, on the southern tip of Cyprus. It was at Akrotiri, with the full cooperation of the British government and the RAF base commander, that the Americans established their operational base. While the U.S. commandos were preparing their operation, heavy USAF transports brought other elements of the U.S. counterterrorist force to Akrotiri. As it began to take shape the plan they devised called for one SEAL team to approach the ship in Zodiacs. A second element was to take off under the cover of darkness in a high-flying aircraft from which they would execute a parachute drop over the Mediterranean. Using specially devised parachutes, they would glide down on the captive ship and — dressed in black battle gear and equipped with silenced guns and shock weapons — link up with their sea-borne confederates and take the vessel back from the terrorists.

The operation was scheduled for the night of Wednesday, 9 October, and it was at this point that highly accurate and detailed intelligence information became critical. North, who was coordinating the operation as head of a special White House counterterrorist task force, was flabbergasted to learn that U.S. intelligence had lost track of the ship on Tuesday, despite all of the sophisticated satellite and communications monitoring equipment possessed by the United States. Without knowing the exact location of the ship, a rescue operation was obviously out of the question.

In defense of the intelligence community, ship detection in mid-ocean is not all that easy. There are a number of ways of locating a ship, including through the signals emitted by its radar, its radio communications, and by means of aerial reconnaissance and photos. The U.S. intelligence community is configured to track the Soviet navy, not commercial vessels. The inability

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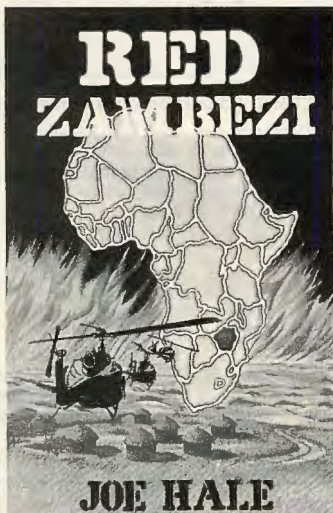
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to locate the *Achille Lauro* was a major embarrassment to the Navy, nevertheless, and at least one high-ranking admiral was overheard to remark that the NSG (Naval Security Group) should be shut down because "it's not worth anything when we need it." The Israelis, by contrast, had suffered a number of terrorist penetrations involving "mother" ships off their coast, and possessed sophisticated monitoring devices capable of locating and tracking potentially threatening vessels.

Using the channel established during the TWA 847 crisis, North turned to the Israelis for help. He called Major General Simhoni at the Israeli embassy in Washington and explained the situation to him. Simhoni, in turn, immediately contacted Israel and was able to report back in minutes with the information North had requested. Apparently the Israelis, fearful that the terrorists on board the *Achille Lauro* might try to carry out their original plan of attacking the Israeli port of Ashdod, had kept the ship under close surveillance.

The *Achille Lauro* was, at this time, steaming along the Syrian coast, since the terrorists hoped that the Syrians would give them safe haven at the military and oil terminus of Tartus. North passed along the information he had received from the Israelis to the National Security Agency (NSA) which, in the interlude, had managed to locate the elusive ship. North, however, had asked Simhoni to keep him

posted on the ship's movements. On Wednesday, the day of the planned operation, NSA again could not locate the hostage cruise liner, and an embarrassed North was forced to turn to the Israelis once again. As before, Simhoni was able to supply North with the ship's exact coordinates. According to Simhoni, from that moment onward, "We kept a secure line open between military intelligence headquarters in Israel and my office at the embassy." Because of Israeli assistance, preparation for the nighttime assault went forward unimpeded, but ultimately the operation was never launched.

After the Syrians refused to let the ship dock at Tartus, the *Achille Lauro* sailed back to Port Said, where it was met by a senior PLO official and Mohammed Abbas, leader of the PLF. They conferred with the terrorists, and it was agreed that the latter would surrender to Egyptian authorities, who subsequently took control of the ship and its passengers. North soon learned, however, that a secret deal between the Egyptian and Italian governments, and the PLO, was in the works. According to North, "The first deal was made between Hosni Mubarak, the Egyptian president, Italian Prime Minister Craxi, and the Chairman of the PLO, Yasir Arafat. It called for freeing the ship and the hostages and the safe return of the terrorists to their base in Tunisia, and would have turned Yasir Arafat into the hero of the day."

Since the incident seemed to have been resolved, the American commandos waiting at Akrotiri, Cyprus, under the command of Brigadier General Carl Stiner, were ordered home. Meanwhile, intense diplomatic efforts to convince the Egyptians to turn the terrorists over to Italy or to the United States were making little progress.

The regular NSC staff meeting was interrupted the following morning with a message from Mubarak informing National Security Adviser Bud McFarlane that the terrorists had already left Egypt. Mubarak had given the same information to Nicholas Veliotis, the U.S. Ambassador to Egypt, and even repeated it publicly. But McFarlane was not convinced. He turned to North and asked where the U.S. commandos were.

"On their way home," replied North, cognizant that some members of SEAL Team 6 were already on Gibraltar en route back to the United States.

"Check where the terrorists are," McFarlane ordered, unwilling to trust the Egyptians.

"Will do," said North, who immediately began polling U.S. intelligence sources. Failing to get definitive information, he called General Simhoni again.

"Uri," North inquired, "where are the four thugs?"

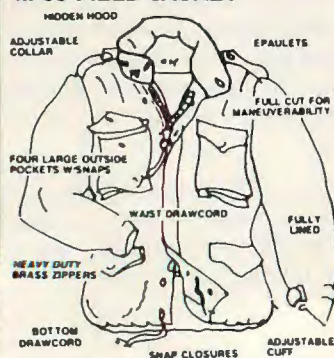
"Give me 30 minutes and I'll get back to you," Simhoni answered.

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tions in the Negev, which are shared with the United States as part of the Israelis' equipment-leasing agreement with NSA. The Israelis, it turned out, had intercepted a number of communications, not only from Mubarak to other members of his government, but subsequently a telephone conversation between the Egyptian chief of internal security and the captain of the Egypt-Air plane that was to carry the terrorists out of the country. The flight plan and time of departure were discussed, along with the fact that there would be Egyptian commandos on board. Ironically, Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger had ordered both DIA (Defense Intelligence Agency) and the NIO (Naval Intelligence Organization) not to talk to the Israelis, presumably because they might learn something that would precipitate U.S. action.

By 0845, Simhoni was able to get back to North and report: "The four are still in Egypt."

"Are you sure?" North demanded, his voice rising with excitement.

"Absolutely."

North went back to U.S. intelligence with the information provided by the Israelis and was soon able to obtain a second confirmation.

Armed with the startling information he had obtained, North rushed upstairs from the Situation Room to McFarlane's office. There he found McFarlane, who was just preparing to board the Marine One helicopter in order to accompany the President on a campaign swing to Chicago; McFarlane's deputy, Vice Admiral John Poindexter; NSC spokesperson Karna Small; Middle East specialist Jock Covey; and McFarlane's secretary.

North immediately launched into a crisp report of the facts in hand. "The friends," he began, using the common euphemism of the U.S. intelligence community, until the arrest of Israeli spy Jonathan J. Pollard, when referring to the Israelis, "have the four in Egypt. We have confirmation." Then he spoke for everyone in the room: "We have to do something about it."

"What can be done?" inquired Poindexter.

"Do you remember Yamamoto?" North asked, recalling the Japanese admiral who had led the attack on Pearl Harbor. In 1943 U.S. codebreakers learned that Yamamoto was going to conduct an inspection visit of Japanese forces in the Northern Solomons, and they laid a trap for him. His aircraft was intercepted and shot down by American P-38 fighters, with the loss of all aboard.

"You don't want to shoot it down?" ventured Poindexter uneasily, referring to the EgyptAir plane.

"No," replied North. "Just force it to land at Sigonella, Sicily."

McFarlane had already made up his mind. "Get moving," he ordered North, before rushing out the door to the waiting helicopter.

In view of the imminent departure of the EgyptAir jetliner with the terrorists on board, every second counted, and North

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went to work like a man possessed to pull the necessary operation together. A short time later, he presented an outline of his plan to Poindexter, who signed off on it at once and then contacted McFarlane on a secure communications link. McFarlane consulted briefly with the President and came back to ask for more details. North and his team immediately set about assembling the information requested, including the proposed rules of engagement governing the operation.

By 1400 Washington time the President had given the order to proceed, but not before encountering strong opposition from Secretary of Defense Weinberger and his deputy, William Howard Taft IV. Weinberger was concerned about the impact the interception would have on U.S. relations with Egypt and the rest of the Arab world. In addition, he raised questions about the procedures that would be used to force the EgyptAir jetliner down and, in general, did everything possible to dissuade the President from giving the mission a green light. Indeed, at one point the security of the mission was compromised by a conversation over an open line between Reagan, on board Air Force One, and Weinberger, en route to his summer home in Maine, which was monitored by a ham radio enthusiast.

Following Reagan's approval, the Sixth Fleet was given new orders, and the aircraft carrier *Saratoga* was directed to sail in the vicinity of Crete at full speed. Accurate real-time intelligence, however, was still a problem. Although U.S. intelligence was doing a good job of keeping the NSC continuously advised as to the whereabouts of the terrorists, the tail number and departure time of the EgyptAir flight still were in question. North once again placed a call to General Simhoni, who had an open line to the office of Major General Ehud Barak, the chief of Israel's military intelligence branch known as AMAN. Simhoni passed along North's request to AMAN and established an open line to the White House Situation Room, from which North was monitoring the operations of the Sixth Fleet.

Minutes later, Barak came back on the line with the needed information, but Simhoni interrupted him and asked him to hold for a moment while he got the White House situation room on the line for a three-way conversation. North, was later to remark, "The Israelis had it all." They provided the United States with the plane's identification numbers and call sign seconds after it was in the air. North, from his desk in the Situation Room, transmitted the crucial information to the *Saratoga* over a secure open line. While the *Saratoga* was launching its F-14 fighters to carry out the interception and take-down, the U.S. commandos, now over the Atlantic, turned around and set a course for the NATO air base at Sigonella.

For the *Saratoga's* fighters, finding the EgyptAir jetliner at night in the busy international air corridor along the southern North African coast promised to be no easy

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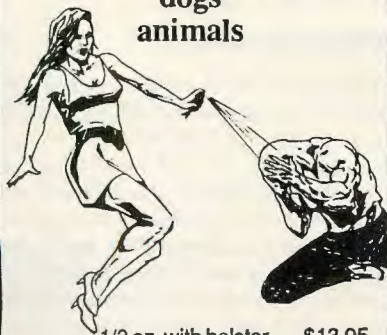
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task. Indeed, at the time that it was intercepted, there were 67 other civilian/commercial jetliners flying in the same vicinity.

Soon the Israelis were back on the line with even more stunning news: PLF leader Mohammed Abbas was on board the Egyptian jetliner. Although he knew that it might get a bit dicey in the end, North was ecstatic, for it was becoming clear that Abbas probably had masterminded the seajacking. The chance to bring a top terrorist leader to justice for his crimes was too good to be true.

The key was now to buy more time for the Tomcats so that they could locate the Egypt-Air jetliner and force it to Sigonella. He asked the Israelis if they could isolate the jetliner by jamming all of its communications, except those they wanted to get through, and at the same time so intimidate the air traffic controller at Tunis that permission for the EgyptAir flight to land would be denied.

At that moment, the Israelis had one of their homemade RC-135 intelligence-gathering clones, built from a Boeing 707, airborne in the Mediterranean. The Israeli Boeing was capable of monitoring an entire conflict theater, interpreting the data, and serving as a flying command post. In one compartment on board, Arabic-speaking Israelis were tuned to every military and civilian radio frequency in the region.

The deception the Israelis were about to engage in was not without precedent. During the Israeli raid on the Iraqi nuclear reactor on 7 June 1981, the Israeli version of the RC-135 picked up an urgent attempt by a pilot to get in touch with the Jordanian Air Force command post. The intelligence officers on board the 707 quickly identified the caller: Jordan's King Hussein, who happened to be enjoying a pleasant afternoon of recreational flying over Jordanian territory in his personal plane. Hussein, it turned out, had just seen the Israeli raiding party, made up of F-15s and F-16s, on its way to Baghdad. Without missing a beat, an Israeli officer in the 707, some 250 miles to the west, acknowledged the King's call and identified himself as the duty officer in the Jordanian Air Force situation room.

"Your majesty," said the Israeli captain in fluent Arabic, "this is Colonel Hisham. How can I be at your service?"

The King, himself a fighter pilot, was direct and to the point as he spoke with the man he assumed was the chief duty officer of his air force. "Eight F-16s and a number of F-15s just flew over the area," he reported. "They penetrated into Saudi territory. Inform our brothers in Saudi Arabia and Iraq that the Israelis are on their way. They are up to something special."

"Will inform the Saudis and the Iraqis right away, Sir," came the response from the Israeli 707.

Satisfied that he had, by sheer coincidence, been able to warn the Saudis and Iraqis of some extraordinary Israeli operation, Hussein swung his plane around and made a direct line for the Jordanian capital. Needless to say, Hussein's message never

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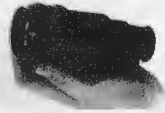
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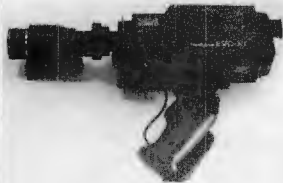
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reached the Saudis or Iraqis. The entire conversation remains on tape within the archives of the Israeli monitoring and listening unit as a classic example of creativity under pressure. Hussein learned only two days later, after a thorough investigation, that he had actually been speaking to an Israeli military officer, who not only spoke Arabic with the proper Jordanian-Bedouin accent, but also used proper Jordanian call signs and designators to remove any suspicion from the King's mind.

In a rerun of this incident four years later, when the pilot of the EgyptAir jetliner bearing Mohammed Abbas and his gunmen to safety sought permission to land from what he thought was the Tunis air traffic controller, his request was denied. As before, the hapless pilot was really communicating with an Arabic-speaking Israeli military officer in the flying intelligence center.

Shortly thereafter the Tomcats, flying with darkened cockpits and without lights, intercepted the jetliner near the island of Crete. The pilot of the jetliner urgently tried to contact Cairo for new orders, but was prevented from doing so by a U.S. EA-6B, which was jamming his radio communications. Just in case the pilot decided to try and make a run for Athens, Beirut, or some other "friendly" city in the region, the U.S. government sent a strong warning to those governments not to let the aircraft land.

Finally, the desperate EgyptAir pilot capitulated and agreed to follow the warplanes surrounding his aircraft toward the Sigonella Air Base. For once we had "bagged the bums." Or so it seemed.

The second and concluding article on Oliver North's secret war on international terrorism will appear in the next issue of SOF. Watch for it.

BLACKJACK

Continued from page 67

Then three small mortars opened fire. "There's no way in hell any of us could catch mortars and throw them back," Blackjack said. He and the Vietnamese team leader rolled over the cadaver wall toward the mortars, cautiously picking their way through the charred NVA bodies and jungle until they were within 20 feet of the first tube. The Vietnamese team leader drew a plan in the ground. He would hit tube one, Blackjack would hit tube three, and they'd combine on tube two.

After the mortar men launched three salvos, the VN team leader opened fire on his target and Blackjack attacked his tube and its infantry squad, killing several soldiers instantly.

The survivors chased Blackjack. In the confusion, the NVA opened fire on each other as Blackjack headed toward tube one, where his counterpart was pinned down. He threw several hand grenades, and killed at least three NVA with a blast of gunfire before he and the VN leader wiped out tube

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two and retreated back to the team.

The first Jolly Green Giant arrived near the LZ and disappeared into the valley in a ball of flames. ST Alabama was stunned.

ST Alabama returned to the cadaver perimeter, nearly out of ammo. One-one was eating dirt and muttering, "The Lord is my shepherd . . ."

When Blackjack tried to talk to Covey he found the primary, secondary and back-up frequencies jammed by the NVA. Frustrated, Blackjack smashed the PRC-25 and pulled out his URC-10 survival radio. He was told an Arc Light (B-52 strike) was two hours away.

The Brightlight mission was scratched in Phu Bai because there were just too damn many NVA troops surrounding ST Alabama. Word of the proposed Arc Light mission reinforced the gravity of ST Alabama's situation. Most team members either monitored PRC-25s, where we could listen to Covey, or went to the Comm Center for the latest word of ST Alabama. That team appeared doomed. All we could do was pray.

Covey said he was low on fuel and had to leave. At 1800 hours, a Jolly Green pilot called: "Blackjack, JG5, over. I'm parked down in the draw, in the trees about one mile from you. Have 20 minutes of fuel before I must leave. . . the first person we MUST see is American. . . Hurry! We're taking heavy ground fire."

ST Alabama discarded anything it couldn't carry over the side of the cliff and, as quickly

as the wounded could move, headed toward the hovering Jolly Green Giant, which had literally cut away treetops and branches to nestle into Mother Nature's lush, thick dark-green foliage for protection.

The NVA's attention went to the chopper, easing the pressure on ST Alabama. "As we neared the Jolly Green, it felt like we were moving up to the gates of hell itself," because the NVA were pouring small arms fire and rocket grenades at the ship while the doorgunners and pilots intermittently fired the mini-gun, M79s and M60s as gunships and Skyraiders made gun-runs around it.

When ST Alabama entered a cool ravine, before climbing the final hill to the chopper, they encountered a village with the hooches built on 10-foot stilts, complete with large pots cooking rice and vegetables.

Instead of NVA troops, Blackjack found an American taking food from one of the pots. He was the pilot of the CH-53 which had crashed earlier. His medic joined them as they headed to the hovering Jolly Green Giant.

Suddenly they heard NVA running through the bushes around them. Time was against them! Blackjack had to move his team onto a trail so they could move quicker. The seriously wounded tailgunner was shaking violently and had turned a pasty white.

At the crest of the trail, they saw the CH-53 hovering, taking hits and dealing out

death; its M60 was red hot. Someone was firing a M16 out the window.

As Blackjack moved to the chopper, the intensity of gunfire multiplied tenfold. "The air was so full of lead I could see it. Fuel and bits of metal skin fell from the aircraft as we reached its underside."

The jungle penetrator smashed to the ground next to him and raised three feet before he put three team members on the first load. The pilot, medic, and a wounded team member were on the second hoist.

Blackjack ran back to the bamboo thicket where he left the rest of the team. The dying tailgunner pointed his .45 at the advancing NVA and said, "Toi Kiet" — I die. He motioned Blackjack to the CH-53 before shooting himself.

Blackjack was running back to the ship when two NVA stepped in front of him, pointing AK-47s at him, as one soldier said, "Chu hoi!"

Blackjack stretched out his arms and continued walking toward them. When he was only a few feet away, he said, "Chu hoi." The young NVA soldiers appeared surprised.

Before they responded, Blackjack grabbed the searing-hot AK barrel from the troop on his left with his left hand, back-handed the soldier on his right, and smashed the soldier on his left in the face.

He left the stunned soldiers lying there as he sprinted to the chopper, where he found the praying One-one. The rest of the team

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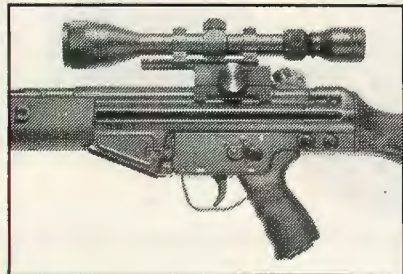
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was on board.

Blackjack grabbed him and slammed him onto the penetrator before jumping on himself. As the penetrator lifted Blackjack and One-one upwards they were showered with hot spent casings from the M60.

Now, the entire team was firing out the windows and from the back door as the overloaded CH-53 began to lift out of the jungle.

As the mighty CH-53 slowly rose, Blackjack felt the ship making upward surges from the the B-40 rockets which were slamming into the armor-plated belly of the aircraft. "It felt like a giant slugging the ship in the stomach, boosting it upwards with each rocket blast."

Once clear of the hole it had chopped in the jungle, the ship began its ascent out of the valley of death.

The doorgunner removed his helmet and placed it on Blackjack's head. The pilot told him, "We're on our way home."

The crippled ship crossed two more ridgelines before descending into a clearing, where everyone except Blackjack and One-one were transferred to another Jolly Green Giant. A Cobra gunship landed and opened the armament compartment doors, which had seatbelts attached to them. Blackjack and One-one buckled up and were soon airborne alongside the Jolly Green Giant.

They were flying so fast that Blackjack had to turn his blood-stained face away in order to breathe. Within minutes, he was so cold he was shivering uncontrollably. The Cobra landed at a Marine medevac site, where the Americans were wrapped in poncho liners and helicoptered to Da Nang.

At the Da Nang infirmary, everyone was getting patched up. The Vietnamese team leader raised his right hand in a fist above his head and yelled, "Chu hoi, Do ma!"

ST Alabama had survived its day in hell.

Then One-one stood up on a chair and yelled, "Listen up, men. I want to commend each and every one of you for a job well done. As the team leader of ST Alabama I want you to all know I personally am going to put each of you in for the Medal of Honor. You medics take care of my people." He stepped down and left the room.

Twenty-one years later, that speech still pisses off Blackjack. That night Blackjack was so mad he knocked the pills out of the medic's hand and instead of lying down for treatment, he went with the Jolly Green medic to his barracks for a show. Then that medic applied bandages and compresses to the numerous bleeding abrasions and shrapnel holes on his chest, back, arms and legs.

While walking to the club, they passed a line of parked Jolly Greens. On the side of one was printed: "SO THAT OTHERS MAY LIVE."

When they entered the club, every man present rose and started clapping their hands. Everyone crowded in and started shaking hands and slapping Blackjack on the back. "God, that hurt," he recalls.

The clock said 2200 hours. At Phu Bai, a

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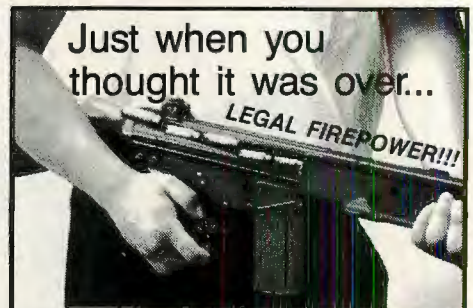
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subdued gathering in the club celebrated Alabama's survival and quietly chalked up the deaths of several good Vietnamese team members. Little was said about the arrogant, dead One-zero.

Blackjack and the medics drank until dawn of 6 October 1968. They recounted the story to all who asked and those who didn't. Not tired, Blackjack finally lay down on a cot in the medic's room. A medic told Blackjack about the Jolly Green crew that didn't make it. He was lying on the crew chief's cot.

Later in the morning, One-one told Blackjack a Kingbee had arrived to take them to Phu Bai. One-one got two cold beers from the fridge, threw one to Blackjack, came to attention and saluted: "October 5th, 1968."

Yeah. ✕

FULL AUTO

Continued from page 17

feed lips up. It's available in tan, dark brown or black leather. It provides an additional 30 rounds for undercover or surveillance operatives who, of course, cannot strut about in cammies and full combat gear. A full-flapped version is also available.

"NAVY SKS"

I recently examined an unusual short-barreled SKS manufactured in the People's Republic of China and was told that it was manufactured for the Chinese Navy. Are these rifles genuine?

Bob Hanes
Fort Lauderdale, Florida

Eight hundred of these so-called "Navy" SKS rifles were cobbled together at the PLA division-level repair shop in Tong Tsiens county. The barrels were shortened to 16 inches, the receiver and stock were modified to accept a Kalashnikov magazine-well and 30-round magazines, a crude (and often inoperable) detent plunger-type hold-open was added to the bolt carrier and a shortened bayonet was then attached.

Poly Technologies, Inc. officials refused to authorize the importation of these blatant counterfeits. Not wishing to lose their entire investment, the arsenal staff bypassed Poly Tech and sold them to a Hong Kong broker, who, in turn, passed them on to a U.S. importer. They were made for profit, not the Chinese Armed Forces, and collectors should avoid them.

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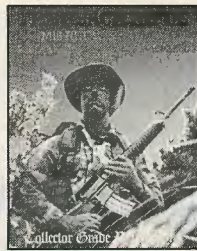
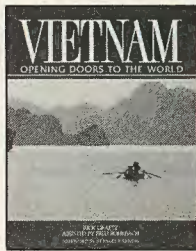
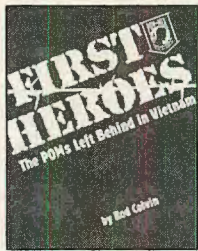
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tory '296' in Szechwan province, which is the largest arsenal in the PRC and employs 17,000 workers. Note that most PRC small arms facilities have factory codes ending with the digit '6,' while ammunition plants usually, but not always (i.e., factory '964') feature factory codes ending in the digit '1.' Some PRC SKS rifles will be encountered with two Chinese characters on the right side of the receiver, just to the rear of the ejection port. This translates as "Police Use."

CZECH REPORT

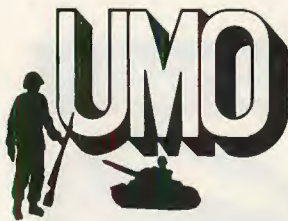
During a recent trip to Czechoslovakia, I visited the Sellier & Bellot ammunition factory in Vlasim. They now produce about one million cartridges per day, about half of which are shotgun shells. The general manager informed me that during the Vietnam War they manufactured 7.65mm French Long ammunition for the Viet Cong. Sellier & Bellot currently manufactures 9mm Makarov ammunition for the new Vz 82 pistol which has almost entirely replaced the caliber 7.62x25mm, roller-locked Vz 52 in military service. The projectiles are made from sintered iron and are about 25 percent lighter than the Soviet bullets in this caliber. As a consequence, the muzzle velocity is higher. The cases are copper-washed steel and head-stamped "bxn" with the date of manufacture. While police units in smaller towns are still carrying the Vz 50 caliber 7.65mm (.32 ACP) pistol, police officers in Prague are now equipped with the Vz 82.

It has been rumored that the Vz 52 pistols have been sold to the West German firm, Waffen Frankonia. If so, they will probably appear shortly on the collectors' market in large numbers. Most have been reconditioned and refinished.

I also learned that Czechoslovakia will not adopt the Soviet 5.45x39mm round. As the Czechoslovak economy is on the verge of collapse, the conversion would not be cost effective and the caliber 7.62x39mm Vz 58 rifle will be retained.

Jiri T. Vojta
Syracuse, New York

SOF reviewed the .380 ACP (9mm Kurz) version of the Vz 82, which is called the CZ 83, in February, 1986. Of high quality and with a large capacity magazine, it is, however, too bulky and heavy for its caliber. To date, it appears that, outside of the Soviet Union, only East Germany and Rumania have converted to the 5.45x39mm cartridge. ✕



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Dept. SF

FLAK

Continued from page 12

should stick to chain saw toting dope dealers and spare us his Vietnam insights... he's over his head in a subject he knows zip about.

Thomas D. Reisinger
Boulder, Colorado

CANAL ZONE IS WAR ZONE...

Sirs:

My wife and I returned to the States from Panama in April of this year. While I was there I worked at the Ammunition Supply Point on Rodman Naval Station. I am a Department of the Army civilian.

There were numerous, perhaps as many as 20, firefights on the ASP and at the tank farm (a fuel storage site) from April 1988 to April 1989. There were also beatings, illegal detentions, and a rape of an American citizen by Noriega's army, the P.D.F. (Panamanian Defense Forces). But hardly anyone in the States knows of the abuse that Americans in Panama put up with at the hands of the P.D.F.

The military, primarily Admiral Crowe, and the president have been cowardly and indifferent to Noriega's terror tactics. So much for a war on drugs.

I understand most of these P.D.F. attacks ended with the deployment of U.S. troops in April. However, I'd like to know why the U.S. continues to allow this dirty-necked dictator to push poison into the U.S., to destroy democracy in Panama, and to align the strategically important Panama Canal with the communist Sandinistas and Castro's communist conquistadores.

Chuck Fowler
Bellemont, Arizona

INDIANAPOLIS SIX HUNDRED...

Sirs:

In your SITREP (August '89) mention was made of the Indianapolis defeat of a proposed semi-auto ban. I was one of some 600 who crowded into the city-county council hall the night debate was held on that particular subject. Hundreds more watched the

Continued on page 95



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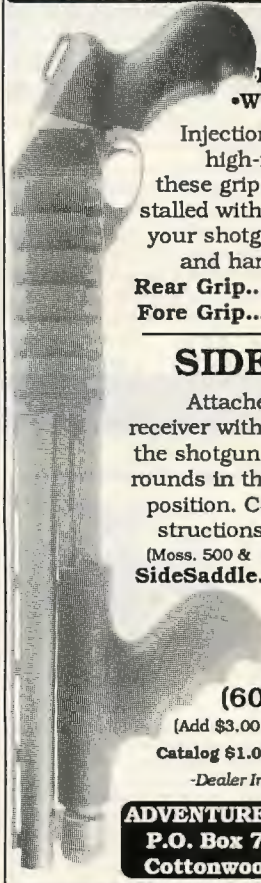
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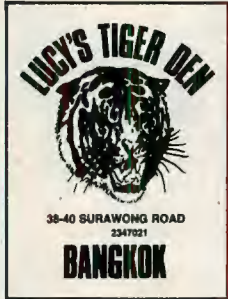
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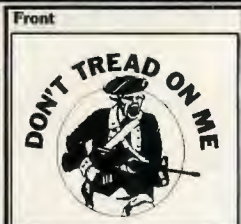
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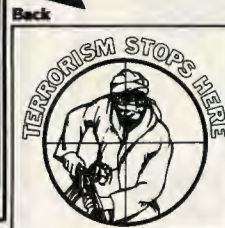
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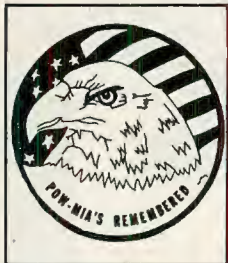
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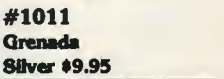
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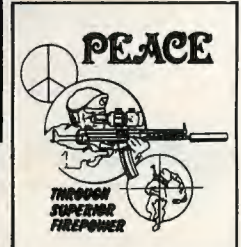
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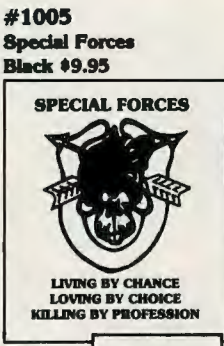
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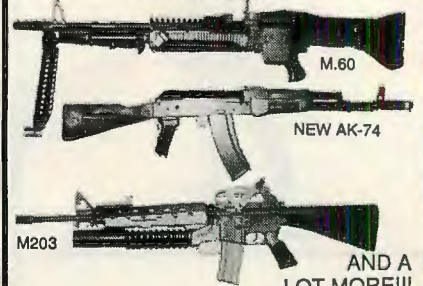
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FLAK

Continued from page 85

proceedings on television outside the council hall.

Until I had participated in this fight I had never really understood just how implacable the anti-gun people really are. I have since heard many people say that, "It'll never happen here; no one will take our guns." To those people I say, "Don't believe it!"

I woke the next morning to a radio station DJ commenting on how many mental institutions must have been emptied the previous night.

I have never considered myself a radical, but freedoms have a price, and if you don't or won't make the effort to keep those freedoms, they will simply evaporate like the mist in the early morning.

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Sirs:

I picked up SOF magazine (September issue) for the first time ever and found it to be entertaining, interesting, and informative. I had been under the impression that SOF was a magazine that you kept hidden in your closet and only brought out at night. For many years I've thought of your magazine as misleading, fiction, full of (bleep), etc., the typical stereotype, but was I ever so wrong.

I particularly liked your article on America's private Delta Force. I remember these incidents when the newspapers reported them. I can relate to both situations (Jordanian/Tunisian), especially the Tunisian incident, because of my last job in the military, which dealt with

training international officers, a majority being Tunisian.

K.L. Manni
Lt.Cmdr., USN (Ret.)
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PARTING SHOT

South Africa: Time to Choose Sides

by R.B. Anderson

EXCEPT for some Afrikaaners, experts of all persuasions agree that apartheid in South Africa is doomed. The only way the United States can ensure that democracy prevails is to actively support the fight for freedom. We must find a democratic movement and back it to the hilt. To understand what must be done, we must take a closer look at South Africa's strategic position and the failure of current policies.

Except for the Soviet Union, South Africa has the richest mineral deposits in the world. It has 86 percent of the Free World's platinum (automotive and electrical uses), 83 percent of its chromium (stainless steel), 64 percent of its vanadium (aircraft frames and engines), and almost half of its manganese (iron and steel) and gold. It is also the world's largest supplier of diamonds, andalusite metals (aluminum), vermiculite (electronics), and asbestos fibers. It ranks second as a supplier of uranium and antimony (hardening alloy), and among the top ten in nickel, copper, tin, silver, coal, and fluorspar. A shutdown of South Africa's mines would cause serious problems for the United States. Recognizing the dangers we face, Senator Nancy Kassebaum has proposed that we stockpile enough minerals to enable us to withstand a five-year cutoff.

As a mineral supplier, South Africa has only one real rival — the Soviet Union. Between them, the two countries control over 90 percent of the world's reserves of platinum and vanadium, over 80 percent of the manganese and chromium and nearly 70 percent of the gold. The two dominate other metals as well. The Soviet Union is the only nation which stands to gain from the U.S. cutting off South Africa. Even better than a shutdown for the Soviets would be South Africa falling into their sphere of influence. It is easy then to understand why southern Africa has been a focal point for Soviet aggression. According to Representative Dan Burton of Indiana, the Soviet strategy is clear — surround South Africa with client states to give their agents, the ANC, a continent-wide arc for continued war with the government.

If successful, this strategy will not only give the Soviets a monopoly of critical minerals but a launch site to choke Western shipping as well. Chet Crocker, then Assistant Secretary of

State, noted that controlling the Cape Route would not be as difficult as some imagine: "Ships can't go too far south or they run into bad weather. The area that ships need to travel in is a narrow channel out of the total body of water." Supertankers laden with oil are too big for the Suez Canal and are forced to take this route to the West. In total, 25,000 ships travel the Cape Route annually.

South Africa is rich in vital minerals, geographically important, plagued with racial turmoil, and surrounded by enemies. For these reasons, South Africa has been called "the soft underbelly of the West." But despite the dangers we face, the United States continues to pursue a flawed foreign policy.

Until October 1986, the Reagan Administration pursued a non-punitive and fruitless policy of "constructive engagement" to encourage change in South Africa. Then over the President's veto, Congress reacted to civil rights pressure by passing the Anti-Apartheid Act that imposed economic sanctions against South Africa. Unfortunately, sanctions proved to work better in threat than in deed. By pulling its best lever, the United States lost much of its leverage, and the South African government has since taken a tougher stand against resistance.

Before the Anti-Apartheid Act, South Africa had learned to live with an arms embargo by producing 95 percent of its weapons. It now exports arms. South Africa has adjusted to economic sanctions by using middle men to launder goods destined for old customers, developing new markets in Africa, and maintaining its Far East sales. South Africa has been accused of joining the Soviets in price rigging. Sanctions have even made some South African businessmen rich. They have been able to buy, at bargain rates, the factories of companies that have pulled out.

Although South Africa is weathering the storm, sanctions have exacted a toll, particularly on the fruit industry. Unfortunately, it is blacks who suffer the most from cutbacks and layoffs. The net result of sanctions is 50,000 blacks have become unemployed. Public opinion polls show that black South Africans do not support harsher economic sanctions if sanctions mean

more lost jobs.

Many blacks wonder why we have set about to wreck the only modern economy in Africa. South Africa produces nearly 75 percent of the continent's total Gross National Product. It has the only large black middle class in Africa and blacks own more cars than do all the citizens of the Soviet Union.

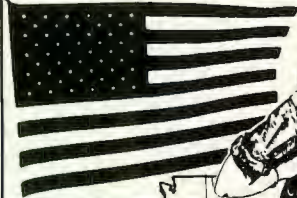
We have unwittingly put ourselves in league with the communists. The Soviet-backed ANC also wants to destroy South Africa's economy because unemployment increases "revolutionary consciousness." The more blacks we disenfranchise, the more recruits we give the ANC. That is why Mango Buthelezi, a high ranking Zulu chief, states, "We should not conduct our struggle in such a way that we destroy the foundations for the future... Any effort to destroy the economy of South Africa sets back the clock of liberation by many decades."

The Bush administration should be cognizant that apartheid has become an American domestic civil rights issue that will not go away. As Senator Robert Dole claims, "It will be on Congress' agenda every year for the next decade." Politicians can ill afford to be seen as soft on civil rights.

Our first step is to choose sides. We cannot allow the ANC to be the broker for black rights. We need to counter both the ANC and de Klerk by supporting an interracial group bent on democratic reform. The Progressive Party may be a candidate. We must legitimize a group by formally recognizing it and promoting it as the agent for change. To send a strong signal to American liberals and South African conservatives, our support must be financial as well as moral. As the very last resort, we should give South African freedom fighters the same type of military aid that we have given Latin American freedom fighters.

To enhance our prospects for success in South Africa, we also need to choose sides in the region. Recent developments in Angola are encouraging. If the Russians and the Cubans are truly tired of funding oppression, then we should take advantage of the situation by supporting those who seek democratic reform in Angola and Mozambique. We should also seek better relations with nations like Zimbabwe, which are not in the Soviet camp.

Constructive engagement has failed, sanctions have failed, and the ANC grows in strength. It is time for the United States to take sides. We need an interracial movement capable of sustaining prosperity. We must find a democratic movement we can support and maintain the political will needed to see it prevail. South Africa is essential to the Free World. We cannot afford to lose it to the Soviets. ✖



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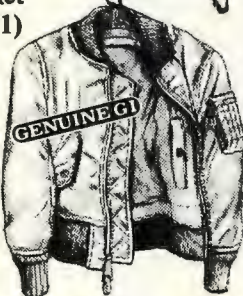
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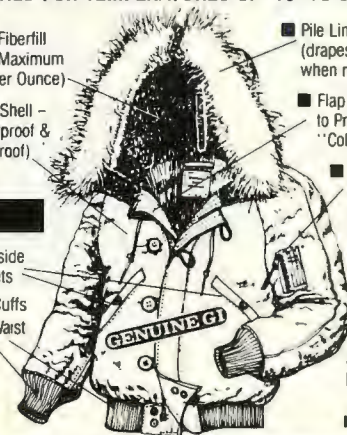
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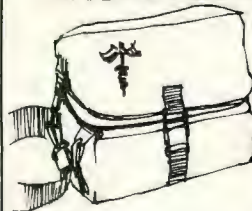
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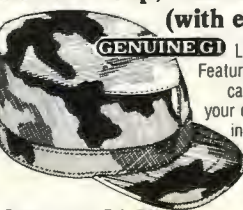
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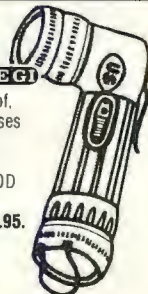
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